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THE BERTRAMS.

A Novel.

BY ANTHONY TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF "BARCHESTER TOWERS," "DOCTOR THORNE," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

CHAPMAN & HALL, 193 PICCADILLY.

1859.

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249. y. 79.



LONDON : PRINTED BY W. CLOWES AND SONS, STAMFORD STREET.

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THE BERTRAMS.

CHAPTER I.

THE NEW MEMBER FOR THE BATTERSEA HAMLETS.

I MUST now ask my readers to pass over two years with me. It is a terrible gap in a story; but in these days the unities are not much considered, and a hiatus which would formerly have been regarded as a fault utterly fatal is now no more than a slight impropriety.

But something must be told of the occurrences of these two years. In the first place, no marriage had taken place—that is, among our personages; nor had their ranks been thinned by any death. In our retrospective view we will give the *pas* to Mr. Harcourt, for he had taken the greatest stride in winning that world's success, which is the goal of all our ambition. He had gone on and prospered greatly; and nowadays all men at the bar said all manner of good things of him. He was already in Parliament as the honourable member for the Battersea Hamlets,

and was not only there, but listened to when it suited him to speak. But when he did speak, he spoke only as a lawyer. He never allowed himself to be enticed away from his own profession by the meretricious allurements of general politics. On points of law reform, he had an energetic opinion; on matters connected with justice, he had ideas which were very much his own—or which at least were stated in language which was so; being a denizen of the common law, he was loud against the delays and cost of Chancery, and was supposed to have supplied the legal details of a very telling tale which was written about this time with the object of upsetting the lord-chancellor as then constituted.

But though he worked as a member only in legal matters, of course he was always ready to support his party with his vote in all matters. His party! here had been his great difficulty on first entering the House of Commons. What should be his party?

He had worked hard as a lawyer. In so doing no party had been necessary to him. Honest hard work—honest, that is, as regarded the work itself, if not always so as regarded the object. Honest hard work, and some cunning in the method of his eloquence, had at first sufficed him. He was not called upon to have, or at any rate

to state, any marked political tenets. But no man can rise to great note as a lawyer without a party. Opulence without note would by no means have sufficed with Mr. Harcourt.

When, therefore, he found it expedient in the course of his profession to go into Parliament, and with this object presented himself to the inhabitants of the Battersea Hamlets, it was necessary that he should adopt a party. At that time the political watchword of the day was the repeal of the corn laws. Now the electors of the Battersea Hamlets required especially to know whether Mr. Harcourt was or was not for free trade in corn.

To tell the truth, he did not care two straws about corn. He cared only for law—for that and what was to be got by it. It was necessary that he should assume some care for corn—learn a good deal about it, perhaps, so as to be able, if called on, to talk on the subject by the hour at a stretch ; but it was not a matter on which he was personally solicitous a fortnight or so before he began his canvass.

The Conservatives were at that time in, and were declared foes to free trade in corn. They were committed to the maintenance of a duty on imported wheat—if any men were ever politically committed to anything. Indeed, it had latterly :

been their great shibboleth—latterly ; that is, since their other greater shibboleths had been cut from under their feet.

At that time men had not learnt thoroughly by experience, as now they have, that no reform, no innovation—experience almost justifies us in saying no revolution—stinks so foully in the nostrils of an English Tory politician as to be absolutely irreconcilable to him. When taken in the refreshing waters of office any such pill can be swallowed. This is now a fact recognized in politics ; and it is a great point gained in favour of that party that their power of deglutition should be so recognized. Let the people want what they will, Jew senators, cheap corn, vote by ballot, no property qualification, or anything else, the Tories will carry it for them if the Whigs cannot. A poor Whig premier has none but the Liberals to back him ; but a reforming Tory will be backed by all the world—except those few whom his own dishonesty will personally have disgusted.

But at that time—some twelve or fifteen years since—all this was not a part of the political A B C ; and Harcourt had much doubt in his own mind as to the party which ought to be blessed with his adherence. Lord chancellorships and lord chief-justiceships, though not en-

joyed till middle life, or, indeed, till the evening of a lawyer's days, must, in fact, be won or lost in the heyday of his career. One false step in his political novitiate may cost him everything. A man when known as a recognized Whig may fight battle after battle with mercenary electors, sit yawning year after year till twelve o'clock, ready to attack on every point the tactics of his honourable and learned friend on the Treasury seats, and yet see junior after junior rise to the bench before him—and all because at starting he decided wrongly as to his party.

If Harcourt had predilections, they were with the Whigs; but he was not weak enough to let any predilection be a burden to his interests. Where was the best opening for him? The Tories—I still prefer the name, as being without definite meaning; the direct falsehood implied in the title of Conservative amounts almost to a libel—the Tories were in; but from the fact of being in, were always liable to be turned out. Then, too, they were of course provided with attorneys and solicitors-general, lords-advocate and legal hangers-on of every sort. The coming chances might be better with the Whigs.

Under these circumstances, he went to his old friend Mr. Die, Mr. Neversaye Die, the rich, quiet, hard-working, old chancery barrister, to

whose fostering care he had some time since recommended his friend Bertram. Every one has some quiet, old, family, confidential friend; a man given to silence, but of undoubted knowledge of the world, whose experience is vast, and who, though he has not risen in the world himself, is always the man to help others to do so. Every one has such a friend as this, and Mr. Neversaye Die was Harcourt's friend. Mr. Die himself was supposed to be a Tory, quite of the old school, a Lord Eldon Tory; but Harcourt knew that this would in no way bias his judgment. The mind of a barrister who has been for fifty years practising in court will never be biassed by his predilections.

Mr. Die soon understood the whole matter. His young friend Harcourt was going into Parliament with the special object of becoming a solicitor-general as soon as possible. He could so become by means only of two moving powers. He must be solicitor-general either to the Whigs or to the Tories. To which he should be so was a question mainly indifferent to Mr. Harcourt himself, and also to Mr. Die in framing his advice.

Mr. Die himself of course regarded corn-law repeal as an invention of the devil. He had lived long enough to have regarded Catholic

emancipation and parliamentary reform in the same light. Could you have opened his mind, you would probably have found there a settled conviction that the world was slowly coming to an end, that end being brought about by such devilish works as these. But you would also have found a conviction that the Three per Cents. would last his time, and that his fear for the future might with safety be thrown forward, so as to appertain to the fourth or fifth, or, perhaps, even to the tenth or twelfth coming generation. Mr. Die was not, therefore, personally wretched under his own political creed.

‘I should be inclined to support the government if I were going into Parliament as a young man,’ said Mr. Die.

‘There are nine seniors of mine in the House who now do so.’ By seniors, Mr. Harcourt alluded to his seniors at the bar.

‘Yes; but they like young blood nowadays. I think it’s the safest.’

‘I shall never carry the Battersea Hamlets unless I pledge myself on this corn-law question.’

‘Well,’ said Mr. Die—‘well; a seat is certainly a great thing, and not to be had at any moment. I think I should be inclined to yield to the electors.’

‘ And commit myself to the repeal of the corn laws ?’

‘ Commit yourself !’ said Mr. Die, with a gentle smile. ‘ A public man has to commit himself to many things nowadays. But my opinion is, that—that you may hold the popular opinion about free trade, and be not a whit the less useful to Sir Robert on that account.’

Mr. Harcourt was still a young man, and was, therefore, excusable in not seeing to the depth of Mr. Die’s wisdom. He certainly did not see to the depth of it ; but he had come to his oracle with faith, and wisely resolved to be guided by wisdom so much superior to his own.

‘ Never bind yourself wantonly to an expiring policy,’ said Mr. Die. ‘ The man who does so has surely to unbind himself ; and, to say the least of it, that always takes time.’

So Mr. Harcourt presented himself to the electors of the Battersea Hamlets as a man very anxious in their behalf in all things, but anxious in their behalf above all things for free trade in corn. ‘ Is it credible, that now, in this year of grace 184—,’ and so on. Such were the eloquent words which he addressed to the electors on this subject, and so taken were they by his enthusiasm that they returned him by a large majority.

Mr. Dod, therefore, in his remarkably useful little parliamentary compendium, put down Mr. Harcourt as a liberal: this he had an opportunity of doing immediately after Mr. Harcourt's election: in his next edition, however, he added, 'but supports the general policy of Sir Robert Peel's government.'

Mr. Harcourt had altogether managed this little affair so well that, despite his youth, despite also those nine political seniors of his, men began to talk of him as one who might shortly hope to fill high places. He made himself very useful in the House, and did so in a quiet, business-like, unexciting manner, very pleasant to the leading politician of the Treasury bench.

And then there came the Irish famine, and all the bindings of all the Tories were scattered to the winds like feathers. The Irishman's potato-pot ceased to be full, and at once the great territorial magnates of England were convinced that they had clung to the horns of a false altar. They were convinced; or at least had to acknowledge such conviction. The prime minister held short little debates with his underlings—with dukes and marquises, with earls and viscounts; held short debates with them, but allowed to no underling—to no duke, and to no viscount—to have any longer an opinion of his own. The

altar had been a false altar: it was enough for them that they were so told. With great wisdom the majority of them considered that this *was* enough; and so the bill for the repeal of the corn laws was brought before the House, and the world knew that it would be carried.

And now there was a great opportunity for Mr. Harcourt. He could support the prime minister and merit all manner of legal generalships without any self-unbinding. Alas! such comfort as this can only belong to the young among politicians! Up to this period he had meddled only with law questions. Now was the time for him to come out with that great liberal speech, which should merit the eternal gratitude of the Tory leader. Just at the time at which we recommence our tale he did come out with a very great liberal speech, in which, as an independent member, he vehemently eulogized the daring policy of that great man who, as he said, was brave enough, and wise enough, and good enough to save his country at the expense of his party. Whether there were not men who could have saved their country without betraying their friends—who would have done so had not Sir Robert been ready with his apostacy; who in fact did so by forcing Sir Robert to his apostacy—as to that, Mr. Harcourt then said nothing. What

might not be expected from the hands of a man so eulogized? of a man who was thus able to keep the votes of the Tories and carry the measures of the Liberals? of a man of whom it might now be predicated that his political power would end only with his political life? We should be going on too fast were we to declare in how few months after this triumph that great political chieftain was driven from the Treasury bench.

Mr. Harcourt's name was now mentioned in all clubs and all dining-rooms. He was an acute and successful lawyer, an eloquent debater, and a young man. The world was at his feet, and Mr. Die was very proud of him. Mr. Die was proud of him, and proud also of his own advice. He said nothing about it even to Harcourt himself, for to Mr. Die had been given the gift of reticence; but his old eye twinkled as his wisdom was confessed by the youth at his feet. 'In politics one should always look forward,' he said, as he held up to the light the glass of old port which he was about to sip; 'in real life it is better to look back,—if one has anything to look back at.' Mr. Die had something to look back at. He had sixty thousand pounds in the funds.

And now we must say a word of Mr. Harcourt, with reference to the other persons of our story. He was still very intimate with Bertram, but he

hardly regarded him in the same light as he had done two years before. Bertram had not hitherto justified the expectation of his friends. This must be explained more at length in the next two chapters; but the effect on Harcourt had been that he no longer looked up with reverence to his friend's undoubted talents. He had a lower opinion of him than formerly. Indeed, he himself had risen so quickly that he had left Bertram immeasurably below him, and the difference in their pursuits naturally brought them together less frequently than heretofore.

But if Harcourt was less concerned than he had been with George Bertram junior, he was much more concerned than he had been with George Bertram senior. He had in former days known nothing of the old merchant; now he was, within certain bounds, almost intimate with him; occasionally dined down at Hadley, and frequently consulted him on money matters of deep import.

With Miss Baker, also, and Caroline Waddington, Mr. Harcourt was intimate. Between him and Miss Baker there existed a warm friendship, and with Caroline, even, he was on such terms that she often spoke to him as to the deep troubles of her love and engagement. For these were deep troubles, as will be seen also in the coming chapters.

George Bertram had been told by Miss Baker that Caroline was the granddaughter of old Mr. Bertram, and George in his confidence with his friend had told him the secret. Indeed, there had been hardly any alternative, for George had been driven to consult his friend more than once as to this delay in his marriage; and who can ever consult a friend with advantage on any subject without telling him all the circumstances?

It was after this that Harcourt and Miss Baker became so intimate. The ladies at Littlebath had many troubles, and during those troubles the famous young barrister was very civil to them. In the latter of those two years that are now gone, circumstances had brought them up to London for a couple of months in the spring; and then they saw much of Mr. Harcourt, but nothing of George Bertram, though George was still the affianced husband of Miss Waddington.

CHAPTER II.

RETROSPECTIVE.—FIRST YEAR.

GEORGE BERTRAM had returned to town that Sunday after the conference in Miss Baker's little room not in the very best of moods. He had talked glibly enough on his way back, because it had been necessary for him to hide his chagrin; but he had done so in a cynical tone, which had given Harcourt to understand that something was wrong. For some ten days after that there had been no intercourse between him and Littlebath; and then he had written a letter to Caroline, full of argument, full also of tenderness, in which he essayed to move her from her high resolve. He had certainly written strongly, if not well. 'He was working,' he said, 'nearly as hard as a man could work, in order to insure success for her. Nothing he was aware but the idea that he was already justified in looking on her as his wife would have induced him to labour so strictly;

and for this he was grateful to her. She had given him this great and necessary incitement ; and he therefore thanked God that he had on his shoulders the burden, as well as in his heart the blessing, of such an engagement. But the strain would be too great for him if the burden were to remain present to him daily, while the blessing was to be postponed for so long a time. He had already felt his spirits numbed and his energy weakened. It seemed to him in all his daily work that his great hope had been robbed from him. His dreams told him that he was to be happy, but his waking moments brought him back to disappointment. He knew that he could not endure it, that he could not remain there at his post, diligent as he fain would be, if his reward were to be postponed for so long. As being under a holy engagement to you,' he wrote, perhaps almost too solemnly, 'I have given up that sort of life to which my natural disposition might have led me. Do not suppose that I say this with regret. I rejoice to have done so, rejoice to be so doing ; but it is for you that I do it. Should I not look to you for my reward ? Granting that there may be risk, shall not I share it ? Supposing that there may be suffering, shall not I endure it ? And if a man with his best efforts may protect a woman from

suffering, I will protect you.' So he had written, and had ended by imploring her to let them be married that autumn.

By return of post he got three lines from her, calling him her dearest, dearest George, and requesting that he would allow her a week to answer his letter at length. It could not be answered without deep thought. This gratified him much, and he wrote another note to her, begging her on no account to hurry herself; that he would wait for her reply with the utmost patience; but again imploring her to be merciful. It was, however, apparent in the tone of his note, apparent at least to Caroline, that he judged the eloquence of his letter to be unanswerable, and that he was already counting on her surrender. This lessened the effect of it on Caroline's heart;—for when first received it had had a strong effect.

On that first morning, when she read it in her bedroom before she went down to breakfast, it certainly had a strong effect on her. She made up her mind that she would say nothing about it to her aunt, at any rate on that day. Her aunt would have advised her to yield at once, and she would have preferred some counsellor of a sterner sort. So she put the letter in her pocket, went down tranquilly to breakfast, and after breakfast wrote the note which we have mentioned.

All that day she thought about it to herself, and all the next day. On the evening of the second day she had all but brought herself to give in. Then came George's note, and the fancied tone of triumph hardened her heart once more. On the evening of that day she was firm to her principles. She had acted hitherto, and would continue to act, according to the course she had laid down for herself.

On the fourth day she was sitting in the drawing-room alone—for her aunt had gone out of Littlebath for the day—when Adela Gauntlet came to call on her. Adela she knew would counsel her to yield, and therefore she would certainly not have gone to Adela for advice. But she was sad at heart; and sitting there with the letter among her threads and needles before her, she gradually found it impossible not to talk of it—to talk of it, and at last to hand it over to be read.

There could be no doubt at all as to the nature of Adela's advice; but Caroline had had no conception of the impetuosity of matured conviction on the subject, of the impassioned eloquence with which that advice would be given. She had been far from thinking that Adela had any such power of passion.

'Well,' said she, as Adela slowly folded the

sheet and put it back into its envelope; 'well; what answer shall I make to it?'

'Can you doubt, Caroline?' said Adela, and Miss Gauntlet's eyes shone as Caroline had never before seen them shine.

'Indeed, I do doubt; doubt very much. Not that I ought to doubt. What I knew to be wise a week ago, I know also to be wise now. But one is so weak, and it is so hard to refuse those whom we love.'

'Hard, indeed!' said Adela. 'To my thinking, a woman would have a stone instead of a heart who could refuse such a request as that from a man to whom she has confessed her love.'

'But because you love a man, would you wish to make a beggar of him?'

'We are too much afraid of what we call beggary,' said Adela. 'Beggary, Caroline, with four hundred pounds a year! You had no right to accept a man if you intended to decline to live with him on such an income as that. He should make no request; it should come from him as a demand.'

'A demand. No; his time for demands has not yet come.'

'But it has come if you are true to your word. You should have thought of all this, and no doubt

did think of it, before you accepted him. You have no right now to make him wretched.'

'And, therefore, I will not make him poor.'

'Poor, poor! How fearfully afraid we are of poverty! Is there nothing worse than poverty, what you call poverty—poverty that cannot have its gowns starched above once a week?' Caroline stared at her, but Adela went on. 'Broken hearts are not half so bad as that; nor daily tears and disappointed hopes, nor dry, dull, dead, listless despondency without one drop of water to refresh it! All that is as nothing to a well-grounded apprehension as to one's larder! Never marry till you are sure that will be full, let the heart be ever so empty.'

'Adela!'

'For others there may be excuse,' she continued, thinking then, as always, of that scene at West Putford, and defending to herself him whom to herself she so often accused; 'but for you there can be none. If you drive him from you now, whatever evil may befall him will lie like a weight of lead upon your heart. If you refuse him now, he is not the man to take it quietly and wait.'

'I can live without him.'

'Yes; it is your pride to say so; and I believe you could live without him. But I think too

well of you to believe that you could live happily without him ; nor will he be happy without you. You will both be proud, and stony-hearted, and wretched—stony-hearted at least in appearance ; not fortunate enough to become so in reality.'

'Why, Adela, one would think that you yourself were the victim of some passion nipped in its bud by a cruel prudence.'

'And so I am.' As she said this she rose from her seat as though she intended, standing there before her companion, to go on with her impassioned warning. But the effect was too much for her ; and falling down on her knees, with her face buried in her hands, she rested them on the sofa, and gave way to sobs and tears.

Caroline was of course much shocked, and did what she could to relieve her ; but Adela merely begged that she might be left to herself one minute. 'One minute,' she said, plaintively, in a voice so different from that she had used just now ; 'one minute and I shall be well again. I have been very foolish, but never say anything about it ; never, never, not to any one ; promise me, promise me, Caroline. Dear Caroline, you do promise me ? No one knows it ; no one must know it.'

Caroline did promise ; but with a natural curiosity she wanted to know the whole story.

Adela, however, would tell her nothing, would say no more about herself. In the agony of her strong feeling she had once pointed to herself as a beacon; but even she herself could not endure to do this again. She would say nothing further about that; but in a more plaintive and softer tone she did not cease to implore her friend not to throw away from her the rich heart which was still within her grasp.

A scene such as this could not but have an effect on Caroline; but it did not ultimately have that which Adela had wished. It was Miss Waddington's doctrine that she should not under any circumstances of life permit herself to be carried away by passion. Why then should she allow Adela's passion to convince her? What were the facts? Of Adela's own case she knew nothing. It might be that she had been cruelly treated. Her friends, her lover, or even she herself might have been in fault. But it would surely be the extreme of folly for her, Caroline Waddington, to allow herself to be actuated by the example of one who had not even shown her of what that example consisted.

The upshot of it all was, that at the end of the week she wrote to George, declaring that, grieved as she was to grieve him, she felt herself obliged to adhere to her former resolution. She also

wrote strongly, and perhaps with more force of logic than her lover had done. 'I trust the time will come,' she said, 'when you will acknowledge that I have been right. But of this I am quite sure, that were I now to yield to you, the time would come very quickly when you would acknowledge me to have been wrong; and that you should then think me to have been wrong would kill me. I am not, I know, fitted, either by disposition or education, to be a poor man's wife. I say this with no pride; though if you choose to take it for pride, I cannot help myself. Nor are you fitted to be the husband of a poor wife. Your love and enthusiasm now make you look on want as a slight evil; but have you ever tried want? Since you left school, have you not had everything that money could buy you? Have you ever been called on to deny yourself any reasonable wish? Never, I believe. Nor have I. What right have we then to suppose that we can do that for each other which we have never yet done for ourselves?

'You talk of the misery of waiting. Is it not because you have as yet known no misery? Have not all men to wait who look for success in life?—to work, and wait, and bide their time? Your present work is, I know, too hard. In whatever you do, you have too much enthusiasm.

Do not kill yourself by work. For my sake, if I may still plead my own sake, do not do so. You say you have given up that sort of life to which your disposition would have led you. I do not believe your disposition to be bad, and I should be grieved to think that you debar yourself from pleasures that are not bad because you are engaged to me.' There was that in the eagerness of Bertram's protestations on this point which could not but be flattering to any girl; but Caroline, when she thought of it, did not wish to be so flattered. She required less passion in her lover and more judgment. She wanted him to be more awake to the fact that the true meaning of their engagement was this, that they two should join themselves together in their world's battle, in order that together each might fight that battle more successfully than either of them could do apart.

'I write this with great grief,' she continued, 'as I know that what I write will grieve you. But I write it under a conviction that I am doing my duty by you. I am ready, however, to acknowledge that such a delay may not be in consonance with your intentions when you proposed to me. That neither of us have deceived the other wilfully I am quite sure; but it may be that we have misunderstood each other. If so,


dear George, let all this be as though it had never been. I do not say this on my own behalf. If you so wish it, I am ready to hold myself as yours, and to wait. Ready, I have said! That is a cold word, and you may supply any other that your heart wishes. But if this waiting be contrary to your wishes, be what you are not willing to endure, then consider the matter as altogether in your own hands. I certainly have no right to bind you to my will; all that I ask in such case is, that your decision shall not be delayed.'

Such was Miss Waddington's letter; a portion of it, at least, for not above the half has been given here. Its effect upon Bertram had not been exhilarating. In his heart he called her cold and heartless, and at first resolved to take her at her word and break off from her. He would willingly have done so as far as she was concerned; but he could not bring himself to do it on his own part. He could not endure to part with her, though he would willingly have punished her by telling her that she had forfeited her claim to him. As it was, he did nothing. For three weeks he neither answered the letter nor went near her, nor gave her any token that he was thinking about her.

Then came a note from Miss Baker, asking him to come to Littlebath. It was good-humoured,

playful, almost witty; too much so for Miss Baker's unassisted epistle-craft, and he at once saw that Caroline had dictated it. Her heart at any rate was light. He answered it by one equally good-humoured and playful, and perhaps more witty, addressed of course to Miss Baker, in which he excused himself at present in consequence of the multiplicity of his town engagements. It was June, and he could not get away without making himself guilty of all manner of perjuries; but in August he would certainly take Littlebath on his way to Scotland.

He had intended that every light word should be a dagger in Caroline's bosom; but there was not a pin's prick in the whole of it. Sullen grief on his part would have hurt her. And it would have hurt her had he taken her at her word and annulled their engagement; for she had begun to find that she loved him more than she had thought possible. She had talked in her prudence, and written in her prudence, of giving him up; but when the time came in which she might expect a letter from him, saying that so it should be, her heart did tremble at the postman's knock; she did feel that she had something to fear. But his joyous, clever, laughing answer to her aunt was all that she could wish. Though she loved him, she could wait; though she loved him, she



did not wish him to be sad when he was away from her. She had reason and measure in her love; but it was love, as she began to find—almost to her own astonishment.

George had alluded not untruly to his own engagements. On the day after he received Caroline's letter he shut up Coke upon Lyttleton for that term, and shook the dust off his feet on the threshold of Mr. Die's chambers. Why should he work? why sit there filling his brain with cobwebs, pouring over old fusty rules couched in obscure language, and useful only for assisting mankind to cheat each other? He had had an object; but that was gone. He had wished to prove to one heart, to one soul, that, young as he was, poor as he was, she need not fear to trust herself to his guardianship. Despite his musty toils, she did fear. Therefore, he would have no more of them. No more of them at any rate then, while the sun was shining so brightly. So he went down to Richmond with Twisleton and Madden, and Hopgood and Fortescue. Heaven knows what they did when they got back to town that night—or, rather, perhaps heaven's enemy. And why not? Caroline did not care whether or no he amused himself as other men do. For her sake he had kept himself from these things. As she was in-

different, why need he care? He cared no longer. There was no more law that term; no more eulogy from gratified Mr. Die; but of jovial days at Richmond or elsewhere there were plenty; plenty also of jovial Bacchanalian nights in London. Miss Waddington had been very prudent; but there might perhaps have been a prudence yet more desirable.

He did go down to Littlebath on his way to Scotland, and remained there three days. He made up his mind as he journeyed down to say nothing about their late correspondence to Caroline till she should first speak of it; and as she had come to an exactly similar resolution on her part, and as both adhered to their intentions, it so fell out that nothing in the matter was said by either of them. Caroline was quite satisfied; but not so Bertram. He again said to himself that she was cold and passionless; as cold as she is beautiful, he declared as he walked home to the 'Plough.' How very many young gentlemen have made the same soliloquy when their mistresses have not been so liberal as they would have had them!

The lovers passed the three days together at Littlebath with apparent satisfaction. They rode together, and walked together, and on one evening danced together; nay, they talked together,

and Miss Baker thought that everything was smooth. But Bertram, as he went off to Scotland, said to himself that she was very, very cold, and began to question with himself whether she did really love him..

‘Do write to me, and tell me what sport you have,’ Caroline had said when he went away. What a subject for a woman to choose for her lover’s letters! She never said, ‘Write, write often; and always when you write, swear that you love me.’ ‘Oh, yes, I’ll write,’ said Bertram, laughing. ‘I’ll give you a succinct account of every brace.’ ‘And send some of them too,’ said Miss Baker. ‘Certainly,’ said George; and so he did.

He was joined with Harcourt and one or two others in this trip to Scotland, and it was then that he told his friend how much he was disturbed by Miss Waddington’s obstinacy; and how he doubted, not as to her heart being his, but as to her having a heart to belong to any one. In answer to this, Harcourt gave him pretty nearly the same counsel as she had done. ‘Wait, my dear fellow, with a little patience; you’ll have lots of time before you for married troubles. What’s the use of a man having half-a-score of children round him just when he is beginning to enjoy life? It is that that Miss Waddington

thinks about; though, of course, she can't tell you so.'

And then, also—that is to say, on some occasion a little subsequent to the conversation above alluded to—Bertram also told his friend what he knew of Miss Waddington's birth.

'Whew-w-w,' whistled Harcourt; 'is that the case? Well, now I am surprised.'

'It is, indeed.'

'And he has agreed to the marriage?'

'He knows of it, and has not disagreed. Indeed, he made some peddling little offer about money.'

'But what has he said to you about it?'

'Nothing, not a word. I have only seen him once since Christmas, and then I did not speak of it; nor did he.'

Harcourt asked fifty other questions on the matter, all eagerly, as though he considered this newly-learned fact to be of the greatest importance: all of which Bertram answered, till at last he was tired of talking of his uncle.

'I cannot see that it makes any difference,' said he, 'whose granddaughter she is.'

'But it does make the greatest difference. I own that I am surprised now that Miss Waddington should wish to delay the marriage. I thought I understood her feelings and conduct on

the matter, and must say that I regarded them as admirable. But I cannot quite understand her now. It certainly seems to me that with such a guarantee as that she needs be afraid of nothing. Whichever of you he selected, it would come to the same thing.'

'Harcourt, if she would marry me to-morrow because by doing so she would make sure of my uncle's money, by heaven, I would not take her! If she will not take me for myself, and what I can do for her, she may let me alone.' Thus majestically spoke Bertram, sitting with his friend on the side of a Scottish mountain, with a flask of brandy and a case of sandwiches between them.

'Then,' said Harcourt, 'you are an ass;' and as he spoke he finished the flask.

Bertram kept his word, and told his lady-love all particulars as to the game he killed; some particulars also he gave her as to scenery, as to his friends, and as to Scotch people. He wrote nice, chatty, amusing letters, such as most people love to get from their friends; but he said little or nothing about love. Once or twice he ventured to tell her of some pretty girl that he met, of some adventure with a laird's daughter; nay, insinuated laughingly that he had not escaped from it quite heart-whole. Caroline answered his letter in the same tone; told him, with ex-

cellent comedy, of the leading facts of life in Littlebath; recommended him by all means to go back after the laird's daughter; described the joy of her heart at unexpectedly meeting Mr. M'Gabbery in the pump-room, and her subsequent disappointment at hearing that there was now a Mrs. M'Gabbery. He had married that Miss Jones, of whom the parental Potts had so strongly disapproved. All this was very nice, very amusing, and very friendly. But Bertram, as a lover, knew that he was not satisfied.

When he had done with the grouse and the laird's daughter he went to Oxford, but he did not then go again to Littlebath. He went to Oxford, and from thence to Arthur Wilkinson's parsonage. Here he saw much of Adela; and consoled himself by talking with her about Caroline. To her he did not conceal his great anger. While he was still writing good-humoured, witty letters to his betrothed, he was saying of her to Adela Gauntlet things harsh—harsher perhaps in that they were true.

'I had devoted myself to her,' he said. 'I was working for her as a galley-slave works, and was contented to do it. I would have borne anything, risked anything, endured anything, if she would have borne it with me. All that I have should have gone to shield her from discomfort.


I love her still, Miss Gauntlet; it is perhaps my misery that I love her. But I can never love her now as I should have done had she come to me then.'

'How can I work now?' he said again. 'I shall be called to the bar of course; there is no difficulty in that; and may perhaps earn what will make us decently respectable. But the spirit, the high spirit is gone. She is better pleased that it should be so. She is intolerant of enthusiasm. Is it not a pity, Miss Gauntlet, that we should be so different?'

What could Adela say to him? Every word that he uttered was to her a truth—a weary, melancholy truth; a repetition of that truth which was devouring her own heart. She sympathized with him fully, cordially, ardently. She said no word absolutely in dispraise of Caroline; but she admitted, and at last admitted so often, that, according to her thinking, Caroline was wrong.

'Wrong!' Bertram would shout. 'Can there be a doubt? Can any one with a heart doubt?' Adela said, 'No; no one with a heart could doubt.'

'She has no heart,' said Bertram. 'She is lovely, clever, fascinating, elegant. She has everything a woman should have except a heart—except a heart.' And then, as he turned



away his face, Adela could see that he brushed his hand across his eyes.

What could she do but weep too? And is it not known to all men—certainly it is to all women—how dangerous are such tears?

Thus during his stay at Hurst Staple, Bertram was frequently at West Putford. But he observed that Adela was not often at his cousin's vicarage, and that Arthur was very seldom at West Putford. The families, it was clear, were on as good terms as ever. Adela and Mary and Sophia would be together, and old Mr. Gauntlet would dine at Hurst Staple, and Arthur would talk about the old rector freely enough. But Bertram rarely saw Adela unless he went to the rectory, and though he dined there with the Wilkinson girls three or four times, Arthur only dined there once.

‘Have you and Arthur quarrelled?’ said he to Adela one day, laughing as he spoke.

‘Oh, no,’ said she; but she could not keep down her rebellious colour as she answered him, and Bertram at once took the hint. To her he said nothing further on that matter.

‘And why don’t you marry, Arthur?’ he asked the next morning.

And Arthur also blushed, not thinking then of Adela Gauntlet, but of that pledge which he

had given to Lord Stapledean—a pledge of which he had repented every day since he had given it.

And here it may be explained, that as Arthur Wilkinson had repented of that pledge, and had felt more strongly from day to day that it had put him in a false and unworthy position, so did his mother from day to day feel with less force the compunction which she had at first expressed as to receiving her son's income. This had become less and less, and now, perhaps, it could no longer boast of an existence. The arrangement seemed to her to be so essentially a good one, her children were provided for in so convenient and so comfortable a manner, it was so natural that she should regard herself as the mistress of that house, that perhaps no blame is due to her in that this compunction ceased. No blame is now heaped upon her, and the fact is merely stated. She had already learned to regard herself as the legal owner of that ecclesiastical income ; and seeing that her son deducted a stipend of one hundred and fifty pounds for merely doing the duty—a curate would have only had the half of that sum, as she sometimes said to herself—and seeing also that he had his fellowship, she had no scruple in making him pay fairly for whatever extra accommodation he received at home—exactly as she would have

done had poor dear old Mr. Wilkinson not been out of the way. Considering all these comfortable circumstances, poor dear old Mr. Wilkinson was perhaps not regretted quite so much as might otherwise have been the case.

Mrs. Wilkinson was in the habit of saying many things from day to day in praise of that good Lord Stapledean, who had so generously thought of her and her widowhood. When she did so Arthur would look grim and say nothing, and his mother would know that he was displeased. 'Surely he cannot begrudge us the income,' she had once said to her eldest daughter. 'Oh, no; I am sure he does not,' said Mary; 'but, somehow, he is not so happy about things as he used to be.' 'Then he must be a very ungrateful boy,' said the mother. Indeed, what more could a young full-fledged vicar want than to have a comfortable house under his mother's apron-string?

'And why don't you marry?' Bertram had asked his cousin. It was odd that Arthur should not marry, seeing that Adela Gauntlet lived so near him, and that Adela was so very, very beautiful.

Up to that day, Bertram had heard nothing of the circumstances under which the living had been given. Then did Wilkinson tell him the

story, and ended by saying—‘You now see that my marriage is quite out of the question.’

Then Bertram began to think that he understood why Adela also remained unmarried, and he began to ask himself whether all the world were as cold-hearted as his Caroline. Could it be that Adela also had refused to venture till her future husband should have a good, comfortable, disposable income of his own? But, if so, she would not have sympathized so warmly with him; and if so, what reason could there be why she and Arthur should not meet each other? Could it then be that Arthur Wilkinson was such a coward?

He said nothing on the matter to either of them, for neither of them had confided to him their sorrows—if they had sorrows. He had no wish to penetrate their secrets. What he had said, and what he had learnt, he had said and learnt by accident. He himself had not their gift of reticence, so he talked of his love occasionally to Arthur, and he talked of it very often to Adela.

And the upshot of his talking to Adela was always this: ‘Why, oh why, was not his Caroline more like to her?’ Caroline was doubtless the more beautiful, doubtless the more clever, doubtless the more fascinating. But what are

beauty and talent and fascination without a heart? He was quite sure that Adela's heart was warm.

He went to Littlebath no more that year. It was well perhaps that he did not. Well or ill as the case may be. Had he done so, he would, in his then state of mind, most assuredly have broken with Miss Waddington. In lieu, however, of accepting Miss Baker's invitation for Christmas, he went to Hadley and spent two or three days there, uncomfortable himself, and making the old man uncomfortable also.

Up to this time he had been completely idle—at any rate, as far as the law was concerned—since the day of his great break down on the receipt of Miss Waddington's letter. He still kept his Temple chambers, and when the day came round in October, he made another annual payment to Mr. Die. On that occasion Mr. Die had spoken rather seriously to him; but up to that time his period of idleness had mainly been the period of the long vacation, and Mr. Die was willing to suppose that this continued payment was a sign that he intended to settle again to work.

'Will it be impertinent to ask,' his uncle at Hadley had said to him—'will it be impertinent to ask what you and Caroline intend to do?' At this time Mr. Bertram was aware that his nephew

knew in what relationship they all stood to each other.

‘No impertinence at all, sir. But, unfortunately, we have no intentions in common. We are engaged to be married, and I want to keep my engagement.’

‘And she wants to break hers. Well, I cannot but say that she is the wiser of the two.’

‘I don’t know that her wisdom goes quite so far as that. She is content to abide the evil day ; only she would postpone it.’

‘That is to say, she has some prudence. Are you aware that I have proposed to make a considerable addition to her fortune—to hers, mind—on condition that she would postpone her marriage till next summer?’

‘I did hear something about some sum of money—that you had spoken to Miss Baker about it, I believe ; but I quite forget the particulars.’

‘You are very indifferent as to money matters, Mr. Barrister.’

‘I am indifferent as to the money matters of other people, sir. I had no intention of marrying Miss Waddington for her money before I knew that she was your granddaughter ; nor have I now that I do know it.’

‘For her money ! If you marry her for more

money than her own fortune, and perhaps a couple of thousands added to it, you are likely to be mistaken.'

'I shall never make any mistake of that kind. As far as I am concerned, you are quite welcome, for me, to keep your two thousand pounds.'

'That's kind of you.'

'I would marry her to-morrow without it. I am not at all sure that I will marry her next year with it. If you exercise any authority over her as her grandfather, I wish you would tell her so, as coming from me.'

'Upon my word you carry it high as a lover.'

'Not too high, I hope, as a man.'

'Well, George, remember this once for all'—and now the old man spoke in a much more serious voice—'I will not interfere at all as her grandfather. Nor will I have it known that I am such. Do you understand that?'

'I understand, sir, that it is not your wish that it should be generally talked of.'

'And I trust that wish has been, and will be complied with by you.'

This last speech was not put in the form of a question; but George understood that it was intended to elicit from him a promise for the future and an assurance as to the past.

'I have mentioned the circumstance to one in-

timate friend with whom I was all but obliged to discuss the matter—'


'Obliged to discuss my private concerns, sir!'

'With one friend, sir; with two, indeed; I think—indeed, I fear I have mentioned it to three.'

'Oh! to three! obliged to discuss your own most private concerns as well as mine with three intimate friends! You are lucky, sir, to have so many intimate friends. As my concerns have been made known to them as well as your own, may I ask who they are?'

George then gave up the three names. They were those of Mr. Harcourt, the Rev. Arthur Wilkinson, and Miss Adela Gauntlet. His uncle was very angry. Had he utterly denied the fact of his ever having mentioned the matter to any one, and had it been afterwards discovered that such denial was false, Mr. Bertram would not have been by much so angry. The offence and the lie together, but joined with the fear and deference to which the lie would have testified, would be nothing so black as the offence without the lie, and without the fear, and without the deference.

His uncle was very angry, but on that day he said nothing further on the matter; neither on the next day did he; but on the third day, just



as George was about to leave Hadley, he said, in his usual bantering tone, 'Don't have any more intimate friends, George, as far as my private matters are concerned.'

'No, sir, I will not,' said George.

It was in consequence of what Mr. Bertram had then learnt that he became acquainted with Mr. Harcourt. As Mr. Harcourt had heard this about his grandchild, he thought it better to see that learned gentleman. He did see him; and, as has been before stated, they became intimate with each other.


And so ended the first of these two years.

CHAPTER III.

RETROSPECTIVE.—SECOND YEAR.

THE next year passed almost more uncomfortably for George Bertram and for the ladies at Littlebath than had the latter months of the last year. Its occurrences can, I hope, be stated less in detail, so that we may get on without too great delay to the incidents of the period which is to be awhile for us the present existing time.

This year was Harcourt's great year. In January and February and March he did great things in Chancery. In April he came into Parliament. In May and June and July, he sat on committees. In August he stuck to his work till London was no longer endurable. In the latter part of autumn there was an extraordinary session, during which he worked like a horse. He studied the corn-law question as well as sundry legal reforms all the Christmas week, and in the following spring he came out with his great speech on



behalf of Sir Robert Peel. But, nevertheless, he found time to devote to the cares and troubles of Miss Baker and Miss Waddington.

In the spring Bertram paid one or two visits to Littlebath; but it may be doubted whether he made himself altogether agreeable there. He stated broadly that he was doing little or nothing at his profession: he was, he said, engaged on other matters; the great excitement to work, under which he had commenced, had been withdrawn from him; and under these circumstances he was not inclined to devote himself exclusively to studies which certainly were not to his taste. He did not condescend again to ask Caroline to revoke her sentence; he pressed now for no marriage; but he made it quite apparent that all the changes in himself for the worse—and there had been changes for the worse—were owing to her obstinacy.

He was now living a life of dissipation. I do not intend that it should be understood that he utterly gave himself up to pleasures disgraceful in themselves, that he altogether abandoned the reins, and allowed himself to live such a life as is passed by some young men in London. His tastes and appetites were too high for this. He did not sink into a slough of despond. He did not become filthy and vicious, callous and bestial;

but he departed very widely astray from those rules which governed him during his first six months in London.

All this was well known at Littlebath ; nor did Bertram at all endeavour to conceal the truth. Indeed, it may be said of him, that he never concealed anything. In this especial case he took a pride in letting Caroline know the full extent of the evil she had done.

It was a question with them whether he had not now given up the bar as a profession altogether. He did not say that he had done so, and it was certainly his intention to keep his terms, and to be called ; but he had now no longer a legal Gamaliel. Some time in the April of this year, Mr. Die had written to him a very kind little note, begging him to call one special morning at the chambers in Stone Buildings, if not very inconvenient to him. Bertram did call, and Mr. Die, with many professions of regard and regret, honestly returned to him his money paid for that year's tutelage. 'It had been,' he said, 'a pleasure and a pride to him to have Mr. Bertram in his chambers ; and would still be so to have him there again. But he could not take a gentleman's money under a false pretence ; as it seemed to be no longer Mr. Bertram's intention to attend there, he must beg to refund it.'

And he did refund it accordingly. This also was made known to the ladies at Littlebath.

He was engaged, he had said, on other matters. This also was true. During the first six months of his anger, he had been content to be idle ; but idleness did not suit him, so he sat himself down and wrote a book. He published this book without his name, but he told them at Littlebath of his authorship ; and some one also told of it at Oxford. The book—or bookling, for it consisted but of one small demy-octavo volume—was not such as delighted his friends either at Littlebath or at Oxford, or even at those two Hampshire parsonages. At Littlebath it made Miss Baker's hair stand on end, and at Oxford it gave rise to a suggestion in some orthodox quarters that Mr. Bertram should be requested to resign his fellowship.

It has been told how, sitting on the Mount of Olives, he had been ready to devote himself to the service of the church to which he belonged. Could his mind have been known at that time, how proud might one have been of him ! His mind was not then known ; but now, after a lapse of two years, he made it as it were public, and Oriel was by no means proud of him.

The name of his little book was a very awful name. It was called the ' Romance of Scripture.'

He began in his first chapter with an earnest remonstrance against that condemnation which he knew the injustice of the world would pronounce against him. There was nothing in his book, he said, to warrant any man in accusing him of unbelief. Let those who were so inclined to accuse him read and judge. He had called things by their true names, and that doubtless by some would be imputed to him as a sin. But it would be found that he had gone no further in impugning the truth of Scripture than many other writers before him, some of whom had since been rewarded for their writings by high promotion in the church. The bishops' bench was the reward for orthodoxy; but there had been a taste for liberal deans. He had gone no further, he said, than many deans.

It was acknowledged, he went on to say, that all Scripture statements could not now be taken as true to the letter; particularly not as true to the letter as now adopted by Englishmen. It seemed to him that the generality of his countrymen were of opinion that the inspired writers had themselves written in English. It was forgotten that they were Orientals, who wrote in the language natural to them, with the customary grandiloquence of orientalism, with the poetic exaggeration which, in the East, was the breath

of life. It was forgotten also that they wrote in ignorance of those natural truths which men had now acquired by experience and induction, and not by revelation. Their truth was the truth of heaven, not the truth of earth. No man thought that the sun in those days did rise and set, moving round the earth, because a prolongation of the day had been described by the sun standing still upon Gibeon. And then he took the book of Job, and measured that by the light of his own candle—and so on.

The book was undoubtedly clever, and men read it. Women also read it, and began to talk, some of them at least, of the blindness of their mothers who had not had wit to see that these old chronicles were very much as other old chronicles. 'The Romance of Scripture' was to be seen frequently in booksellers' advertisements, and Mr. Mudie told how he always had two thousand copies of it on his shelves. So our friend did something in the world; but what he did do was unfortunately not applauded by his friends.

Harcourt very plainly told him that a man who scribbled never did any good at the bar. The two trades, he said, were not compatible. 'No,' said George, 'I believe not. An author must be nothing if he do not love truth; a barrister must be nothing if he do.' Harcourt was

no whit annoyed by the repartee, but having given his warning, went his way to his work.

It was very well known that the 'Romance of Scripture' was Bertram's work, and there was a comfortable row about it at Oxford. The row was all private, of course—as was necessary, the book having been published without the author's name. But much was said, and many letters were written. Bertram, in writing to the friend at Oriel who took up the cudgels in his defence, made three statements. First, that no one at Oxford had a right to suppose that he was the author. Second, that he was the author, and that no one at Oxford had a right to find fault with what he had written. Thirdly, that it was quite a matter of indifference to him who did find fault. To this, however, he added, that he was ready to resign his fellowship to-morrow if the Common-room at Oriel wished to get rid of him.

So the matter rested—for awhile. Those who at this time knew Bertram best were confident enough that his belief was shaken, in spite of the remonstrance so loudly put forth in his first pages. He had intended to be honest in his remonstrance; but it is not every man who exactly knows what he does believe. Every man! Is there, one may almost ask, any man who has such knowledge? We all believe in the resurrec-

tion of the body ; we say so at least, but what do we believe by it ?

Men may be firm believers and yet doubt some Bible statements—doubt the letter of such statements. But men who are firm believers will not be those to put forth their doubts with all their eloquence. Such men, if they devote their time to Scripture history, will not be arrested by the sun's standing on Gibeon. If they speak out at all, they will speak out rather as to all they do believe than as to the little that they doubt. It was soon known to Bertram's world that those who regarded him as a freethinker did him no great injustice.

This and other things made them very unhappy at Littlebath. The very fact of George having written such a book nearly scared Miss Baker out of her wits. She, according to her own lights, would have placed freethinkers in the same category with murderers, regicides, and horrid mysterious sinners who commit crimes too dreadful for women to think of. She would not believe that Bertram was one of these ; but it was fearful to think that any one should so call him. Caroline, perhaps, would not so much have minded this flaw in her future husband's faith if it had not been proof of his unsteadiness, of his unfitness for the world's battle. She remembered

what he had said to her two years since on the Mount of Olives; and then thought of what he was saying now. Everything with him was impulse and enthusiasm. All judgment was wanting. How should such as he get on in the world? And had she indissolubly linked her lot to that of one who was so incapable of success? No; indissolubly she had not so linked it; not as yet.

One night she opened her mind to her aunt, and spoke very seriously of her position. 'I hardly know what I ought to do,' she said. 'I know how much I owe him; I know how much he has a right to expect from me. And I would pay him all I owe; I would do my duty by him even at the sacrifice of myself if I could plainly see what my duty is.'

'But, Caroline, do you wish to give him up?'

'No, not if I could keep him; keep him as he was. My high hopes are done with; my ambition is over; I no longer look for much. But I would fain know that he still loves me before I marry him. I would wish to be sure that he means to live with me. In his present mood, how can I know aught of him? how be sure of anything?'

Her aunt, after remaining for some half-hour in consideration, at last and with reluctance gave her advice.

‘It all but breaks my heart to say so; but, Caroline, I think I would abandon it: I think I would ask him to release me from my promise.’

It may well be imagined that Miss Waddington was not herself when she declared that her high hopes were done with, that her ambition was over. She was not herself. Anxiety, sorrow, and doubt—doubt as to the man whom she had pledged herself to love, whom she did love—had made her ill, and she was not herself. She had become thin and pale, and was looking old and wan. She sat silent for awhile, leaning with her head on her hand, and made no answer to her aunt’s suggestion.

‘I really would, Caroline; indeed, I would. I know you are not happy as you are.’

‘Happy!’

‘You are looking wretchedly ill, too. I know all this is wearing you. Take my advice, Caroline, and write to him.’

‘There are two reasons against it, aunt; two strong reasons.’

‘What reasons, love?’

‘In the first place, I love him.’ Aunt Mary sighed. She had no other answer but a sigh to give to this. ‘And in the next place, I have no right to ask anything of him.’

‘Why not, Caroline?’

‘He made his request to me, and I refused it. Had I consented to marry him last year, all this would have been different. I intended to do right, and even now I do not think that I was wrong. But I cannot impute fault to him. He does all this in order that I may impute it, and that then he may have his revenge.’

Nothing more was said on the matter at that time, and things went on for awhile again in the same unsatisfactory state.

Early in the summer, Miss Waddington and her aunt went up for a few weeks to London. It had been Miss Baker’s habit to spend some days at Hadley about this time of the year. She suggested to Caroline, that instead of her doing so, they should both go for a week or so to London. She thought that the change would be good for her niece, and she thought also, though of this she said nothing, that Caroline would see something of her lover. If he were not to be given up, it would be well—so Miss Baker thought—that this marriage should be delayed no longer. Bertram was determined to prove that marriage was necessary to tame him; he had proved it—at any rate to Miss Baker’s satisfaction. There would now be money enough to live on, as uncle Bertram’s two thousand pounds had been pro-

mised for this summer. On this little scheme Miss Baker went to work.

Caroline made no opposition to the London plan. She said nothing about George in connection with it; but her heart was somewhat softened, and she wished to see him.


Miss Baker therefore wrote up for rooms. She would naturally, one would say, have written to George, but there were now little jealousies and commencements of hot blood even between them. George, though still Caroline's engaged lover, was known to have some bitter feelings, and was believed perhaps by Miss Baker to be more bitter than he really was. So the lodgings were taken without any reference to him. When they reached town they found that he was abroad.

Then Miss Waddington was really angry. They had no right, it is true, to be annoyed in that he was not there to meet them. They had not given him the opportunity. But it did appear to them that, circumstanced as they were, considering the acknowledged engagement between them, he was wrong to leave the country without letting them have a word to say whither he was going or for how long. It was nearly a fortnight since he had written to Caroline, and, for anything they knew, it might be months before she again heard from him.

It was then that they sent for Harcourt, and at this period that they became so intimate with him. Bertram had told him of this foreign trip, but only a day or two before he had taken his departure. It was just at this time that there had been the noise about the 'Romance of Scripture.' Bertram had defended himself in one or two newspapers, had written his defiant letter to his friend at Oxford, and then started to meet his father at Paris. He was going no further, and might be back in a week. This however must be uncertain, as his return would depend on that of Sir Lionel. Sir Lionel intended to come to London with him.

Mr. Harcourt was very attentive to them—in spite of his being at that time so useful a public man. He was very attentive to both, being almost as civil to the elder lady as he was to the younger, which, for an Englishman, showed very good breeding. By degrees they both began to regard him with confidence—with sufficient confidence to talk to him of Bertram; with sufficient even to tell him of all their fears. By degrees Caroline would talk to him alone, and when once she permitted herself to do so, she concealed nothing.

Harcourt said not a word against his friend. That friend himself might perhaps have thought



that his friend, speaking of him behind his back, might have spoken more warmly in his praise. But it was hard at present to say much that should be true in Bertram's praise. He was not living in a wise or prudent manner; not preparing himself in any way to live as a man should live by the sweat of his brow. Harcourt could not say much in his favour. That Bertram was clever, honest, true, and high-spirited, that Miss Waddington knew; that Miss Baker knew; what they wanted to learn was, that he was making prudent use of these high qualities. Harcourt could not say that he was doing so.

'That he will fall on his legs at last,' said Harcourt once when he was alone with Caroline, 'I do not doubt; with his talent, and his high, honest love of virtue, it is all but impossible that he should throw himself away. But the present moment is of such vital importance! It is so hard to make up for the loss even of twelve months!'

'I am sure it is,' said Caroline; 'but I would not care for that so much if I thought—'

'Thought what, Miss Waddington?'

'That his disposition was not altered. He was so frank, so candid, so—so—so affectionate.'

'It is the manner of men to change in that respect. They become, perhaps, not less affectionate, but less demonstrative.'

To this Miss Waddington answered nothing. It might probably be so. It was singular enough that she, with her ideas, should be complaining to a perfect stranger of an uncaressing, unloving manner in her lover; she who had professed to herself that she lived so little for love! Had George been even kneeling at her knee, her heart would have been stern enough. It was only by feeling a woman's wrong that she found herself endowed with a woman's privilege.

'I do not think that Bertram's heart is changed,' continued Harcourt; 'he is doubtless very angry that his requests to you last summer were not complied with.'

'But how could we have married then, Mr. Harcourt? Think what our income would have been; and he as yet without any profession!'

'I am not blaming you. I am not taking his part against you. I only say that he is very angry.'

'But does he bear malice, Mr. Harcourt?'

'No, he does not bear malice; men may be angry without bearing malice. He thinks that you have shown a want of confidence in him, and are still showing it.'

'And has he not justified that want of confidence?'

To this Harcourt answered nothing, but he smiled slightly.

‘ Well, has he not ? What could I have done ? What ought I to have done ? Tell me, Mr. Harcourt. It distresses me beyond measure that you should think I have been to blame.’

‘ I do not think so ; far from it, Miss Waddington. Bertram is my dear friend, and I know his fine qualities ; but I cannot but own that he justified you in that temporary want of confidence which you now express.’

Mr. Harcourt, though a member of Parliament and a learned pundit, was nevertheless a very young man. He was an unmarried man also, and a man not yet engaged to be married. It may be surmised that George Bertram would not have been pleased had he known the sort of conversations that were held between his dear friend and his betrothed bride. And yet Caroline at this period loved him better than ever she had done.

A week or ten days after this three letters arrived from Bertram, one for Caroline, one for Miss Baker, and one for Harcourt. Caroline and her aunt had lingered in London, both doubtless in the hope that Bertram would return. There can be little doubt now that had he returned, and had he been anxious for the marriage, Miss Waddington would have consented. She was becoming ill at ease, dissatisfied, what the world


calls heart-broken. Now that she was tried, she found herself not to be so strong in her own resolves. She was not sick from love alone; her position was altogether wretched—though she was engaged, and persisted in adhering to her engagement, she felt and often expressed to her aunt a presentiment that she and Bertram would never be married.

They waited for awhile in the hope that he might return; but instead of himself, there came three letters. Harcourt, it seemed, had written to him, and hence arose these epistles. That to Miss Baker was very civil and friendly. Had that come alone it would have created no complaint. He explained to her that had he expected her visit to London, he would have endeavoured to meet her; that he could not now return, as he had promised to remain awhile with his father. Sir Lionel had been unwell, and the waters of Vichy had been recommended. He was going to Vichy with Sir Lionel, and would not be in London till August. His plans after that were altogether unsettled, but he would not be long in London before he came to Littlebath. Such was his letter to Miss Baker.

To Harcourt he wrote very shortly. He was obliged to him for the interest he took in the welfare of Miss Waddington, and for his attention

to Miss Baker. That was nearly all he said. There was not an angry word in the letter; but, nevertheless, his friend was able to deduce from it, short as it was, that Bertram was angry.

But on the head of his betrothed he poured out the vial of his wrath. He had never before scolded her, had never written in an angry tone. Now in very truth he did so. An angry letter, especially if the writer be well loved, is so much fiercer than any angry speech, so much more unendurable! There the words remain, scorching, not to be explained away, not to be atoned for by a kiss, not to be softened down by the word of love that may follow so quickly upon spoken anger. Heaven defend me from angry letters! They should never be written, unless to schoolboys and men at college; and not often to them if they be any way tender hearted. This at least should be a rule through the letter-writing world: that no angry letter be posted till four-and-twenty hours shall have elapsed since it was written. We all know how absurd is that other rule, that of saying the alphabet when you are angry. Trash! Sit down and write your letter; write it with all the venom in your power; spit out your spleen at the fullest; 'twill do you good; you think you have been injured; say all that you



can say with all your poisoned eloquence, and gratify yourself by reading it while your temper is still hot. Then put it in your desk ; and, as a matter of course, burn it before breakfast the following morning. Believe me that you will then have a double gratification.


A pleasant letter I hold to be the pleasantest thing that this world has to give. It should be good-humoured ; witty it may be, but with a gentle diluted wit. Concocted brilliancy will spoil it altogether. Not long, so that it be tedious in the reading ; nor brief, so that the delight suffice not to make itself felt. It should be written specially for the reader, and should apply altogether to him, and not altogether to any other. It should never flatter. Flattery is always odious. But underneath the visible stream of pungent water there may be the slightest under-current of eulogy, so that it be not seen, but only understood. Censure it may contain freely, but censure which in arraigning the conduct implies no doubt as to the intellect. It should be legibly written, so that it may be read with comfort ; but no more than that. Caligraphy betokens caution, and if it be not light in hand it is nothing. That it be fairly grammatical and not ill spelt the writer owes to his schoolmaster ; but this should come of habit, not of care. Then

let its page be soiled by no business ; one touch of utility will destroy it all.

If you ask for examples, let it be as unlike Walpole as may be. If you can so write it that Lord Byron might have written it, you will not be very far from high excellence.

But, above all things, see that it be good-humoured.

Bertram's letter to the lady that he loved was by no means one of this sort. In the first place, it was not good-humoured ; it was very far from being so. Had it been so, it would utterly have belied his feelings. Harcourt had so written to him as to make him quite clearly understand that all his sins and—which was much more to him—all his loves had been fully discussed between his friend and Miss Waddington—between his Caroline and another man. To the pride of his heart nothing could be more revolting. It was as though his dearest possession had been ransacked in his absence, and rifled and squandered by the very guardian to whom he had left the key. There had been sore misgivings, sore differences between him and Caroline ; but, nevertheless, she had had all his heart. Now, in his absence, she had selected his worldly friend Harcourt, and discussed that possession and its flaws with him ! There was that in all this of



which he could not write with good-humour. Nevertheless, had he kept his letter to the second morning, it may probably be said that he would have hesitated to send it.

‘My dearest Caroline,’ it began. Now I put it to all lovers whether, when they wish to please, they ever write in such manner to their sweet-hearts. Is it not always, ‘My own love?’ ‘Dearest love?’ ‘My own sweet pet?’ But that use of the Christian name, which is so delicious in the speaking during the first days of intimacy, does it not always betoken something stern at the beginning of a lover’s letter? Ah, it may betoken something very stern! ‘My dearest Jane, I am sorry to say it, but I could not approve of the way in which you danced with Major Simkins last night.’ ‘My dearest Lucy, I was at Kensington-garden gate yesterday at four, and remained absolutely till five. You really ought—.’ Is not that always the angry lover’s tone?

I fear that I must give Bertram’s letter entire to make the matter sufficiently clear.


‘My dearest Caroline,

‘I learn from Mr. Harcourt that you and Miss Baker are in town, and I am of course sorry to miss you. Would it not have been better that I should have heard this from yourself?

‘ Mr. Harcourt tells me that you are dissatisfied ; and I understand from his letter that you have explained your dissatisfaction very fully to him. It might have been better, I think, that the explanation should have been made to me ; or had you chosen to complain, you might have done so to your aunt, or to your grandfather. I cannot think that you were at liberty to complain of me to Mr. Harcourt. My wish is, that you have no further conversation with him on our joint concerns. It is not seemly ; and, if feminine, is at any rate not ladylike.

‘ I am driven to defend myself. What is it of which you complain, or have a right to complain ? We became engaged more than twelve months since, certainly with no understanding that the matter was to stand over for three years. My understanding was that we were to be married as soon as it might reasonably be arranged. You then took on yourself to order this delay, and kindly offered to give me up as an alternative. I could not force you to marry me ; but I loved you too well, and trusted too much in your love to be able to think that that giving up was necessary. Perhaps I was wrong.

‘ But the period of this wretched interval is at my own disposal. Had you married me, my time would have been yours. It would have



been just that you should know how it was spent. Each would then have known so much of the other. But you have chosen that this should not be; and, therefore, I deny your right now to make inquiry. If I have departed from any hopes you had formed, you have no one to blame but yourself.

‘ You have said that I neglect you. I am ready to marry you to-morrow; I have been ready to do so any day since our engagement. You yourself know how much more than ready I have been. I do not profess to be a very painstaking lover; nay, if you will, the life would bore me, even if in our case the mawkishness of the delay did not do more than bore. At any rate, I will not go through it. I loved, and do love you truly. I told you of it truly when I first knew it myself, and urged my suit till I had a definite answer. You accepted me, and now there needs be nothing further till we are married.

‘ But I insist on this, that I will not have my affairs discussed by you with persons to whom you are a stranger.

‘ You will see my letter to your aunt. I have told her that I will visit her at Littlebath as soon as I have returned to England.

‘ Yours ever affectionately,

‘ G. B.’

This letter was a terrible blow to Caroline. It seemed to her to be almost incredible that she, she, Caroline Waddington, should be forced to receive such a letter as that under any circumstances and from any gentleman. Unseemly, unfeminine, unladylike! These were the epithets her lover used in addressing her. She was told that it bored him to play the lover; that his misconduct was her fault; and then she was accused of mawkishness! He was imperative, too, in laying his orders to her. 'I insist on this!' Was it incumbent on her to comply with his insistings?

Of course she showed the letter to her aunt, whose advice resulted in this—that it would be better that she should pocket the affront silently if she were not prepared to give up the engagement altogether. If she were so prepared, the letter doubtless would give her the opportunity.

And then Mr. Harcourt came to her while her anger was yet at the hottest. His manner was so kind, his temper so sweet, his attention so obliging, that she could not but be glad to see him. If George loved her, if he wished to guide her, wished to persuade her, why was not he at her right hand? Mr. Harcourt was there instead. It did not bore him, multifold as his duties were, to be near her.

Then she committed the first great fault of which in this history she will be shown as being guilty. She showed her lover's letter to Mr. Harcourt. Of course this was not done without some previous converse; till he had found out that she was wretched, and inquired as to her wretchedness; till she had owned that she was ill with sorrow, beside herself, and perplexed in the extreme. Then at last, saying to herself that she cared not now to obey Mr. Bertram, she showed the letter to Mr. Harcourt.

'It is ungenerous,' said Harcourt.

'It is ungentlemanlike,' said Caroline. 'But it was written in passion, and I shall not notice it.' And so she and Miss Baker went back again to Littlebath.

It was September before Bertram returned, and then Sir Lionel came with him. We have not space to tell much of what had passed between the father and the son; but they reached London apparently on good terms with each other, and Sir Lionel settled himself in a bedroom near to his son's chambers, and near also to his own club. There was, however, this great ground of disagreement between them. Sir Lionel was very anxious that his son should borrow money from Mr. Bertram, and George very resolutely declined to do so. It was now clear enough to Sir Lionel

that his son could not show his filial disposition by advancing on his own behalf much money to his father, as he was himself by no means in affluent circumstances.

He went down to Littlebath, and took his father with him. The meeting between the lovers was again unloverlike; but nothing could be more affectionate than Sir Lionel. He took Caroline in his arms and kissed her, called her his dear daughter, and praised her beauty. I believe he kissed Miss Baker. Indeed, I know that he made an attempt to do so; and I think it not at all improbable that in the overflowing of his affectionate heart, he made some overture of the same kind to the exceedingly pretty parlour-maid who waited upon them. Whatever might be thought of George, Sir Lionel soon became popular there, and his popularity was not decreased when he declared that he would spend the remainder of the autumn, and perhaps the winter, at Littlebath.

He did stay there for the winter. He had a year's furlough, during which he was to remain in England with full pay, and he made it known to the ladies at Littlebath that the chief object of his getting this leave was to be present at the nuptials of dear Caroline and his son. On one occasion he borrowed thirty pounds from Miss

Baker; a circumstance which their intimacy, perhaps, made excusable. He happened, however, to mention this little occurrence casually to his son, and George at once repaid that debt, poor as he was at the time.

‘You could have that and whatever more you chose merely for the asking,’ said Sir Lionel on that occasion, in a tone almost of reproach.

And so the winter passed away. George, however, was not idle. He fully intended to be called to the bar in the following autumn, and did, to a certain extent, renew his legal studies. He did not return to Mr. Die, prevented possibly by the difficulty he would have in preparing the necessary funds. But his great work through the winter and in the early spring was another small volume, which he published in March, and which he called, ‘The Fallacies of Early History.’

We need not give any minute criticism on this work. It will suffice to say that the orthodox world declared it to be much more heterodox than the last work. Heterodox, indeed! It was so bad, they said, that there was not the least glimmer of any doxy whatever left about it. The early history of which he spoke was altogether Bible history, and the fallacies to which he

alluded were the plainest statements of the book of Genesis. Nay, he had called the whole story of Creation a myth; the whole story as there given: so at least said the rabbis of Oxford, and among them outspoke more loudly than any others the outraged and very learned rabbis of Oriel.

Bertram however denied this. He had, he said, not called anything a myth. There was the printed book, and one might have supposed that it would be easy enough to settle this question. But it was far from being so. The words myth and mythical were used half a dozen times, and the rabbis declared that they were applied to the statements of Scripture. Bertram declared that they were applied to the appearance those statements must have as at present put before the English world. Then he said something not complimentary to the translators, and something also very uncivil as to want of intelligence on the part of the Oxford rabbis. The war raged warmly, and was taken up by the metropolitan press, till Bertram became a lion—a lion, however, without a hide, for in the middle of the dispute he felt himself called on to resign his fellowship.

He lost that hide; but he got another in lieu which his friends assured him was of a much

warmer texture. His uncle had taken considerable interest in this dispute, alleging all through that the Oxford men were long-eared asses and bigoted monks. It may be presumed that his own orthodoxy was not of a high class. He had never liked George's fellowship, and had always ridiculed the income which he received from it. Directly he heard that it had been resigned, he gave his nephew a thousand pounds. He said nothing about it; he merely told Mr. Pritchett to arrange the matter.

Sir Lionel was delighted. As to the question of orthodoxy he was perfectly indifferent. It was nothing to him whether his son called the book of Genesis a myth or a gospel; but he had said much, very much as to the folly of risking the fellowship; and more, a great deal more, as to the madness of throwing it away. But now he was quite ready to own himself wrong, and did do so in the most straightforward manner. After all, what was a fellowship to a man just about to be married? In his position Bertram had of course been free to speak out. If, indeed, there had been any object in holding to the college, then the expression of such opinions, let alone their publication, would not have been judicious.

As it was, however, nothing could have been

more lucky. His son had shown his independence. The rich uncle had shown the warm interest which he still took in his nephew, and Sir Lionel was able to borrow two hundred and fifty pounds, a sum of money which, at the present moment, was very grateful to him. Bertram's triumph was gilded on all sides; for the booksellers had paid him handsomely for his infidel manuscript. Infidelity that can make itself successful will, at any rate, bring an income.

And this brings us to the period at which we may resume our story. One word we must say as to Caroline. During the winter she had seen her lover repeatedly, and had written to him repeatedly. Their engagement, therefore, had by no means been broken. But their meetings were cold, and their letters equally so. She would have married him at once now if he would ask her. But he would not ask her. He was quite willing to marry her if she would herself say that she was willing so far to recede from her former resolution. But she could not bring herself to do this. Each was too proud to make the first concession to the other, and therefore no concession was made by either.

Sir Lionel once attempted to interfere; but he failed. George gave him to understand that he

could manage his own affairs himself. When a son is frequently called on to lend money to his father, and that father is never called on to repay it, the parental authority is apt to grow dull. It had become very dull in this case.

CHAPTER IV.

RICHMOND.

IT was in the midst of this noise about Bertram's new book that the scene is presumed to be reopened. He had resigned his fellowship, and pocketed his thousand pounds. Neither of these events had much depressed his spirits, and he appeared now to his friends to be a happy man in spite of his love troubles. At the same time, Harcourt also was sufficiently elate. He had made his great speech with considerable *éclat*, and his sails were full of wind—of wind of a more substantial character than that by which Bertram's vessel was wafted.

And just now Harcourt and Bertram were again much together. A few months since it had appeared to Harcourt that Bertram intended to do nothing in the world, to make no figure. Even now there was but little hope of his doing much as a barrister; but it seemed pro-

bable that he might at any rate make himself known as an author. Such triumphs, as Harcourt well knew, were very barren; but still it was well to know men who were in any way triumphant; and therefore the barrister, himself so triumphant, considered it judicious not to drop his friend.

It may be said that Bertram had given up all idea of practising as a barrister. He still intended to go through the form of being called; but his profession was to be that of an author. He had all manner of works in hand: poems, plays, political pamphlets, infidel essays, histories, and a narrative of his travels in the East. He had made up his mind fully that there were in England only two occupations worthy of an Englishman. A man should be known either as a politician or as an author. It behoved a man to speak out what was in him with some audible voice, so that the world might hear. He might do so either by word of mouth, or by pen and paper; by the former in Parliament, by the latter at his desk. Each form of speech had its own advantage. Fate, which had made Harcourt a member of Parliament, seemed to intend him, Bertram, to be an author.

Harcourt, though overwhelmed by business at this period, took frequent occasion to be with

Bertram ; and when he was with him alone he always made an effort to talk about Miss Waddington. Bertram was rather shy of the subject. He had never blamed Harcourt for what had taken place while he was absent in Paris, but since that time he had never volunteered to speak of his own engagement.

They were together one fine May evening on the banks of the river at Richmond. George was fond of the place, and whenever Harcourt proposed to spend an evening alone with him, they would go up the river and dine there.

On this occasion Harcourt seemed determined to talk about Miss Waddington. Bertram, who was not in the best possible humour, had shown, one might say plainly enough, that it was a subject on which he did not wish to speak. One might also say that it was a subject as to talking on which the choice certainly ought to have been left to himself. A man who is engaged may often choose to talk to his friend about his engaged bride ; but the friend does not usually select the lady as a topic of conversation except in conformity with the Benedict's wishes.

On this occasion, however, Harcourt would talk about Miss Waddington, and Bertram, who had already given one or two short answers, began to feel that his friend was almost impertinent.

They were cracking decayed walnuts and sipping not the very best of wine, and Bertram was expatiating on Sir Robert Peel's enormity in having taken the wind out of the sails of the Whigs, and rehearsing perhaps a few paragraphs of a new pamphlet that was about to come out, when Harcourt again suddenly turned the conversation.

'By-the-by,' said he, 'I believe there is no day absolutely fixed for your marriage.'

'No,' said Bertram, sharply enough. 'No day has been fixed. Could anything on earth have been more base than the manner in which he has endeavoured to leave Cobden as a necessary legacy to the new government? Would he have put Cobden into any place in a government of his own?'

'Oh, d—— Cobden! One has enough of him in the House,—quite.'

'But I have not that advantage.'

'You shall have some of these days. I'll make over the Battersea Hamlets to you as soon as I can get a judge's wig on my head. But I'm thinking of other things now. I wonder whether you and Caroline Waddington ever will be man and wife?'

'Probably about the time that you are made a judge.'

'Ha! ha! Well, I hope if you do do it, it will

come off before that. But I doubt it's coming off at all. Each of you is too proud for the other. Neither of you can forgive what the other has done.'

'What do you mean? But to tell you the truth, Harcourt, I have no great inclination to discuss that matter just at present. If you please, we will leave Miss Waddington alone.'

'What I mean is this,' said the embryo judge, perseveringly, 'that you are too angry with her on account of this enforced delay, and she is too angry with you because you have dared to be angry with her. I do not think you will ever come together.'

Bertram looked full at Harcourt as this was said, and observed that there was not the usual easy, gentlemanlike smile on the barrister's face; and yet the barrister was doing his best to look as usual. The fact was, that Harcourt was playing a game, and playing it with considerable skill, but his performance was not altogether that of a Garrick. Something might have been read in his face had Bertram been cunning enough to read it. But Bertram was not a cunning man.

Bertram looked full in the other's face. Had he been content to do so and to say nothing, he would have gained his point, and the subject would have been at once dropped. Harcourt

then could have gone no further. But Bertram was now angry, and, being angry, he could not but speak.

‘Harcourt, you have interfered once before between me and Miss Waddington—’

‘Interfered!’

‘Yes, interfered—in what I then thought and still think to have been a very unwarrantable manner.’

‘It was a pity you did not tell me of it at the time.’

‘It is a pity rather that you should drive me to tell you of it now; but you do so. When I was in Paris, you said to Miss Waddington what you had no right to say.’

‘What did I say?’

‘Or, rather, she said to you—’

‘Ah! that was no fault of mine.’

‘But it was a fault of yours. Do you think that I cannot understand? that I cannot see? She would have been silent enough to you but for your encouragement. I do not know that I was ever so vexed as when I received that letter from you. You took upon yourself—’

‘I know you were angry, very angry. But that was not my fault. I said nothing but what a friend under such circumstances was bound to say.’

‘Well, let the matter drop now; and let Miss Waddington and myself settle our own affairs.’

‘I cannot let the matter drop; you have driven me to defend myself, and I must do it as best I may. I know that you were angry, exceedingly angry—

‘Exceedingly angry!’ he repeated; ‘but that was no fault of mine. When Miss Baker sent for me, I could not but go to her. When I was there, I could not but listen to her. When Caroline told me that she was wretched—’

‘Miss Waddington!’ shouted Bertram, in a voice that caused the glasses to shake, and made the waiter turn round. And then suddenly recollecting himself, he scowled round the room as he observed that he was noticed.

‘Hush, my dear fellow. It shall be Miss Waddington; but not quite so loud. And I beg your pardon, but hearing the lady called by her Christian name so often, both by yourself and Miss Baker, I forgot myself. When she spoke to me of her wretched state, what was I to do? Was I to say, fie! fie! and take my hat and go away?

‘She was very wretched,’ he continued, for Bertram merely scowled and said nothing, ‘and I could not but sympathize with her. She

thought that you had neglected her. It was clear that you had gone abroad without telling her. Was it to be wondered at that she should be unhappy ?

‘ Her telling you that she was so was unexcusable.’

‘ At any rate, I am blameless. I myself think that she was also ; but that is another question. In what I wrote to you, I did my duty as a friend to both parties. After that, I do confess that I thought your anger too great to allow you ever to stand at the altar with her.’

‘ You do not mean to say that she showed you my letter ?’ said Bertram, almost leaping at him.

‘ Your letter ! what letter ?’

‘ You know what letter—my letter from Paris ? The letter which I wrote to her in reference to the one I received from you ? I desire at once to have an answer from you. Did Caroline show you that letter ?’

Harcourt looked very guilty, extremely guilty ; but he did not immediately make any reply.

‘ Harcourt, answer me,’ said Bertram, much more coolly. ‘ I have no feeling of anger now with you. Did Caroline show you that letter ?’

‘ Miss Waddington did show it to me.’

And thus the successful Mr. Harcourt had been successful also in this. And now, having

narrated this interview in a manner which does not make it redound very much to that gentleman's credit, I must add to the narrative his apology. If even-handed justice were done throughout the world, some apology could be found for most offences. Not that the offences would thus be wiped away, and black become white; but much that is now very black would be reduced to that sombre, uninviting shade of ordinary brown which is so customary to humanity.

Our apology for Mr. Harcourt will by no means make his conduct white—will leave it, perhaps, of a deeper, dingier brown than that which is quite ordinary among men; nay, will leave it still black, many will say.

Mr. Harcourt had seen that which in his opinion proved that Bertram and Miss Waddington could never be happy with each other. He had seen that which in his opinion led to the conclusion that neither of them really wished that this marriage should take place. But he had seen that also which made him believe that both were too proud to ask for a release. Under such circumstances, would he be doing ill if he were to release them? Caroline had so spoken, spoken even to him, that it seemed impossible to him that she could wish

for the marriage. Bertram had so written that it seemed equally impossible that he should wish for it. Would it not, therefore, be madness to allow them to marry? He had said as much to Miss Baker, and Miss Baker had agreed with him. 'He cannot love her,' Miss Baker had said, 'or he would not neglect her so shamefully. I am sure he does not love her.'

But there was a man who did love her, who had felt that he could love her from the first moment that he had seen her as an affianced bride: he had not then courted her for himself; for then it was manifest that she both loved and was loved. But now, now that this was altered, was there good cause why he should not covet her now? Mr. Harcourt thought that there was no sufficient cause.

And then this man, who was not by nature a vain man, who had not made himself apt at believing that young beauties fell readily in love with him, who had not spent his years in basking in ladies' smiles, imagined that he had some ground to think that Miss Waddington was not averse to him. Oh, how she had looked when that part of Bertram's letter had been read, in which he professed that he would not be bored by any love-duties for his lady! And then, this man had been kind to her; he had shown that

such service would be no bore to him. He had been gentle-mannered to her; and she also, she had been gentle to him :

‘The woman cannot be of nature’s making

Whom, being kind, her misery makes not kinder.’

And Caroline was kind; at least so he thought, and heaven knows she was miserable also. And thus hopes rose which should never have risen, and schemes were made which, if not absolutely black, were as near it as any shade of brown may be.

And then there was the fact that Caroline was the granddaughter, and might probably be the heiress, of one of the wealthiest men in the city of London. The consideration of this fact had doubtless its weight also. The lady would at least have six thousand pounds, might have sixty, might have three times sixty. Harcourt would probably have found it inexpedient to give way to any love had there been no money to gild the passion. He was notoriously a man of the world; he pretended to be nothing else; he would have thought that he had made himself ludicrous if he had married for love only. With him it was a source of comfort that the lady’s pecuniary advantages allowed him the hope that he might indulge his love. So he did indulge it.

He had trusted for awhile that circumstances

would break off this ill-assorted match, and that then he could step in himself without any previous interference in the matter. But the time was running too close: unless something was done, these two poor young creatures would marry, and make themselves wretched for life. Benevolence itself required that he should take the matter in hand. So he did take it in hand, and commenced his operations—not unskilfully, as we have seen.

Such is our apology for Mr. Harcourt. A very poor one, the reader will say, turning from that gentleman with disgust. It is a poor one. Were we all turned inside out, as is done with ladies and gentlemen in novels, some of us might find some little difficulty in giving good apologies for ourselves. Our shade of brown would often be very dark.

Bertram sat for awhile silent and motionless at the table, and Harcourt seeing his look of grief, almost repented what he had done. But, after all, he had only told the truth. The letter had been shown to him.

‘It is incredible,’ said Bertram, ‘incredible, incredible!’ But, nevertheless, his voice showed plainly enough that the statement to him was not incredible.

‘Let it be so,’ said Harcourt, who purposely

misunderstood him. 'I do not wish you to believe me. Let us leave it so. Come, it is time for us to go back to town.' But Bertram still sat silent, saying nothing.

Harcourt called the waiter, and paid the bill. He then told Bertram what his share was, and commenced smoothing the silk of his hat preparatory to moving. Bertram took out his purse, gave him the necessary amount of shillings, and then again sat silent and motionless.

'Come, Bertram, there will be only one train after this, and you know what a crowd there is always for that. Let us go.'

But Bertram did not move. 'Harcourt, if you would not mind it,' he said, very gently, 'I would rather go back by myself to-day. What you have said has put me out. I shall probably walk.'

'Walk to town!'

'Oh, yes; the walk will be nothing: I shall like it. Don't wait for me, there's a good fellow. I'll see you to-morrow, or next day, or before long.'

So Harcourt, shrugging his shoulders, and expressing some surprise at this singular resolve, put his hat on his head and walked off by himself. What his inward reflections were on his journey back to London we will not inquire;

but will accompany our other friend in his walk.

Hurriedly as it had been written, he remembered almost every word of that letter from Paris. He knew that it had been severe, and he had sometimes perhaps regretted its severity. But he knew also that the offence had been great. What right had his affianced bride to speak of him to another man? Was it not fit that he should tell her how great was this sin? His ideas on the matter were perhaps too strong, but they certainly are not peculiar. We—speaking for the educated male sex in England—do not like to think that any one should tamper with the ladies whom we love.

But what was this to that which she had since done? To talk of him had been bad, but to show his letters! to show such a letter as that! to show such a letter to such a person! to make such a confidence, and with such a confidant! It could not be that she loved him; it could not be but that she must prefer that other man to him.

As he thought of this, walking on hurriedly towards London on that soft May night, his bosom swelled, but with anger rather than with sorrow. It must be all over then between them. It could not go on after what he had now been

told. She was willing, he presumed, to marry him, having pledged him her word that she would do so; but it was clear that she did not care for him. He would not hold her to her pledge; nor would he take to his bosom one who could have a secret understanding with another man.

‘Miss Baker,’ he said to himself, ‘had treated him badly; she must have known this; why had she not told him? If it were so that Miss Waddington liked another better than him, would it not have been Miss Baker’s duty to tell him so? It did not signify however; he had learnt it in time—luckily, luckily, luckily.’

Should he quarrel with Harcourt? What mattered it whether he did or no? or what mattered it what part Harcourt took in the concern? If that which Harcourt had said were true, if Caroline had shown him this letter, he, Bertram, could never forgive that! If so, they must part! And then, if he did not possess her, what mattered who did? Nay, if she loved Harcourt, why should he prevent their coming together? But of this he would make himself fully satisfied; he would know whether the letter had truly been shown. Harcourt was a barrister; and in Bertram’s estimation a barrister’s word was not always to be taken implicitly.

So he still walked on. But what should he

first do? how should he act at once? And then it occurred to him that, according to the ideas generally prevalent in the world on such matters, he would not be held to be justified in repudiating his betrothed merely because she had shown a letter of his to another gentleman. He felt in his own mind that the cause was quite sufficient; that the state of mind which such an act disclosed was clearly not that of a loving, trusting wife. But others might think differently: perhaps Miss Baker might do so; or perhaps Miss Waddington.

But then it was not possible that she could ever wish to marry him after having taken such a course as that. Had he not indeed ample cause to think that she did not wish to marry him? She had put it off to the last possible moment. She had yielded nothing to his urgent request. In all her intercourse with him she had been cold and unbending. She had had her moments of confidence, but they were not with him; they were with one whom perhaps she liked better. There was no jealousy in this, not jealousy of the usual kind. His self-respect had been injured, and he could not endure that. He hardly now wished that she should love him.

But he would go to Littlebath at once and ask her the question. He would ask her all those

questions which were now burning inside his heart. She did not like severe letters, and he would write no more such to her. What further communication might of necessity take place between them should be by word of mouth. So he resolved to go down to Littlebath on the morrow.

And then he reached his chambers, weary and sad at heart. But he was no longer angry. He endeavoured to persuade himself that he was absolutely the reverse of angry. He knelt down and prayed that she might be happy. He swore that he would do anything to make her so. But that anything was not to include any chance of a marriage with himself.

CHAPTER V.

JUNO.

IN spite of his philosophy and his prayers, Bertram went to bed not in a very happy state of mind. He was a man essentially of a warm and loving heart. He was exigent, and perhaps even selfish in his love. Most men are so. But he did love, had loved; and having made up his mind to part from that which he had loved, he could not be happy. He had often lain awake, thinking of her faults to him; but now he lay thinking of his faults to her. It was a pity, he said to himself, that their marriage should have been so delayed; she had acted foolishly in that, certainly; had not known him, had not understood his character, or appreciated his affection; but, nevertheless, he might have borne it better. He felt that he had been stern, almost savage to her; that he had resented her refusal to marry him at once too violently: he threw heavy blame

on himself. But through all this, he still felt that they could not now marry. Was it not clear to him that Caroline would be delighted to escape from her engagement if the way to do so were opened to her?

He lost no time in carrying out his plans. By an early train on the following day he went down to Littlebath, and at once went to his father's lodgings. For Sir Lionel, in order that he might be near his dear daughter, was still living in Littlebath. He had entered the second, or lighter fast set, played a good deal at cards, might constantly be seen walking up and down the assembly-rooms, and did something in horse-flesh.

George first went to his father's lodgings, and found him still in bed. The lighter fast set at Littlebath do not generally get up early, and Sir Lionel professed that he had not lately been altogether well. Littlebath was fearfully, fearfully cold. It was now May, and he was still obliged to keep a fire. He was in a very good humour however with his son, for the period of the two hundred and fifty pounds' loan was not long passed by. Gratitude for that had not yet given way to desire for more.

'Oh, George! is that you? I am delighted to see you. Going up to the terrace, I suppose? I

was with Caroline for a few minutes last night, and I never saw her looking better—never.’

George answered by asking his father where he meant to dine. Sir Lionel was going to dine out. He usually did dine out. He was one of those men who have a knack of getting a succession of gratis dinners; and it must be confessed in his favour—and the admission was generally made in the dining-out world,—that Sir Lionel was worth his dinner.

‘Then I shall probably return this evening; but I will see you before I go.’

Sir Lionel asked why he would not dine as usual in Montpellier Terrace; but on this subject George at present gave him no answer. He merely said that he thought it very improbable that he should do so, and then went away to his work. It was hard work that he had to do, and he thoroughly wished that it was over.

He did not however allow himself a moment to pause. On the contrary, he walked so quick, that when he found himself in Miss Baker’s drawing-room, he was almost out of breath, and partly from that cause, and partly from his agitation, was unable to speak to that lady in his usual unruffled manner.

‘Ah, how do you do, Miss Baker? I’m very glad to see you. I have run down to-day in a



great hurry, and I am very anxious to see Caroline. Is she out?’

‘Miss Baker explained that she was not out; and would be down very shortly.

‘I’m glad she’s not away, for I am very anxious to see her—very.’

Miss Baker, with her voice also in a tremble, asked if anything was the matter.

‘No; nothing the matter. But the truth is, I’m tired of this, Miss Baker, and I want to settle it. I don’t know how she may bear it, but it has half killed me.’

Miss Baker looked at him almost aghast, for his manner was energetic and almost wild. Only that he so frequently was wild, she would have feared that something dreadful was about to happen. She had not, however, time to say anything further, for Caroline’s step was heard on the stairs.

‘Could you let us be alone for ten minutes,’ said George. ‘But I feel the shame of turning you out of your own drawing-room. Perhaps Caroline will not mind coming down with me into the parlour.’


But Miss Baker of course waived this objection, and as she retreated, the two ladies met just at the drawing-room door. Caroline was about to speak, but was stopped by the expression on

her aunt's face. Ladies have little ways of talking to each other, with nods and becks and wreathed smiles, which are quite beyond the reach of men; and in this language aunt Mary did say something as she passed which gave her niece to understand that the coming interview would not consist merely of the delights which are common among lovers. Caroline, therefore, as she entered the room composed her face for solemn things, and walked slowly, and not without some dignity in her mien, into the presence of him who was to be her lord and master.

‘We hardly expected you, George,’ she said.

His father had been right. She was looking well, very well. Her figure was perhaps not quite so full, nor the colour in her cheek quite so high as when he had first seen her in Jerusalem; but, otherwise, she had never seemed to him more lovely. The little effort she had made to collect herself, to assume a certain majesty in her gait, was becoming to her. So also was her plain morning dress, and the simple braid in which her hair was collected. It might certainly be boasted of Miss Waddington that she was a beauty of the morning rather than of the night; that her complexion was fitted for the sun rather than for gaslight.

He was going to give up all this! And why?



That which he saw before him, that which he had so often brought himself to believe, that which at this moment he actually did believe to be as perfect a form of feminine beauty as might be found by any search in England, was as yet his own. And he might keep it as his own. He knew, or thought he knew enough of her to be sure that, let her feelings be what they might, she would not condescend to break her word to him. Doubtless, she would marry him; and that in but a few months hence if only he would marry her! Beautiful as she was, much as she was his own, much as he still loved her, he had come there to reject her! All this flashed through his mind in a moment. He lost no time in idle thoughts.

‘Caroline,’ he said, stretching out his hand to her—usually when he met her after any absence he had used his hand to draw her nearer to him with more warmth than his present ordinary greeting showed—‘Caroline, I have come down to have some talk with you. There is that between us which should be settled.’

‘Well, what is it?’ she said, with the slightest possible smile.

‘I will not, if I can help it, say any word to show that I am angry—’

‘But are you angry, George? If so, had you


not better show it? Concealment will never sit well on you.'

'I hope not; nor will I conceal anything willingly. It is because I so greatly dislike concealment that I am here.'

'You could not conceal anything if you tried, George. It is useless for you to say that you will not show that you are angry. You are angry, and you do show it. What is it? I hope my present sin is not a very grievous one. By your banishing poor aunt out of the drawing-room, I fear it must be rather bad.'

'I was dining with Mr. Harecourt last night, and it escaped him in conversation that you had shown to him the letter which I wrote to you from Paris. Was it so, Caroline? Did you show him that very letter?'

Certainly, no indifferent listener would have said that there was any tone of anger in Bertram's voice; and yet there was that in it which made Miss Waddington feel that the room was swimming round and round her. She turned ruby red up to her hair. Bertram had never before seen her blush like that; for he had never before seen her covered by shame. Oh! how she had repented showing that letter! How her soul had grieved over it from the very moment that it had passed out of her hand! She had



done so in the hotness of her passion. He had written to her sharp stinging words which had maddened her. Up to that moment she had never known how sharp, how stinging, how bitter words might be. The world had hitherto been so soft to her! She was there told that she was unfeminine, unladylike! And then, he that was sitting by her was so smooth, so sympathizing, so anxious to please her! In her anger and her sympathy she had shown it; and from that day to this she had repented in the roughness of sack-cloth and the bitterness of ashes. It was possible that Caroline Waddington should so sin against a woman's sense of propriety; that, alas! had been proved; but it was impossible that she should so sin and not know that she had sinned, not feel the shame of it.

She did stand before him red with shame; but at the first moment she made no answer. It was in her heart to kneel at his feet, to kneel in the spirit if not in the body, and ask his pardon; but hitherto she had asked pardon of no human being. There was an effort in the doing of it which she could not at once get over. Had his eyes looked tenderly on her for a moment, had one soft tone fallen from his lips, she would have done it. Down she would have gone and implored his pardon. And who that he had once

loved had ever asked aught in vain from George Bertram? Ah, that she had done so! How well they might have loved each other! What joy there might have been!

But there was nothing tender in his eye, no tender tone softened the words which fell from his mouth.

‘What!’ he said, and in spite of his promise, his voice had never before sounded so stern, —‘what! show that letter to another man; show that letter to Mr. Harcourt! Is that true, Caroline?’

A child asks pardon from his mother because he is scolded. He wishes to avert her wrath in order that he may escape punishment. So also may a servant of his master, or an inferior of his superior. But when one equal asks pardon of another, it is because he acknowledges and regrets the injury he has done. Such acknowledgment, such regret will seldom be produced by a stern face and a harsh voice. Caroline, as she looked at him and listened to him, did not go down on her knees—not even mentally. Instead of doing so, she remembered her dignity, and wretched as she was at heart, she continued to seat herself without betraying her misery.

‘Is that true, Caroline? I will believe the

charge against you from no other lips than your own.'

'Yes, George; it is true. I did show your letter to Mr. Harcourt.' So stern had he been in his bearing that she could not condescend even to a word of apology.

He had hitherto remained standing; but on hearing this he flung himself into a chair and buried his face in his hands. Even then she might have been softened, and he might have relented, and all might have been well!

'I was very unhappy, George,' she said; 'that letter had made me very unhappy, and I hardly knew where to turn for relief.'

'What!' he said, jumping up and flashing before her in a storm of passion to which his former sternness had been as nothing—'what! my letter made you so unhappy that you were obliged to go to Mr. Harcourt for relief! You appealed for sympathy from me to him! from me who am—no, who was, your affianced husband! Had you no idea of the sort of bond that existed between you and me? Did you not know that there were matters in which you could not look for sympathy to such as him without being false, nay, almost worse than false? Have you ever thought what it is to be the one loved object of a man's heart, and to have accepted

that love?' She had been on the point of interrupting him, but the softness of these last words interrupted her for a moment.

'Such a letter as that! Do you remember that letter, Caroline?'

'Yes, I remember it; remember it too well; I would not keep it. I would not feel that such words from you were ever by me.'

'You mean that it was harsh?'

'It was cruel.'

'Harsh or cruel, or what you will—I shall not now stop to defend it—it was one which from the very nature of it should have been sacred between us. It was written to you as to one to whom I had a right to write as my future wife.'

'No one could have a right to write such a letter as that.'

'In it, I particularly begged that Mr. Harcourt might not be made an arbiter between us. I made a special request that to him, at least, you would not talk of what causes of trouble there might be between us; and yet you selected him as your confidant, read it with him, poured over with him the words which had come hot from my heart, discussed with him my love—my—my—my—Bah! I cannot endure it; had not you yourself told me so, I could not have believed it.'

'George!—'

‘Good God! that you should take my letters and read them over with him! Why, Caroline, it admits but of one solution; there is but one reading to the riddle; ask all the world.’

‘We sent for him as your friend.’

‘Yes, and seem to have soon used him as your own. I have no friend to whom I allow the privilege of going between me and my own heart’s love. Yes, you were my own heart’s love. I have to get over that complaint now as best I may.’

‘I may consider then that all is over between us.’

‘Yes; there. You have back your hand. It is again your own to dispose of to whom you will. Let you have what confidences you will, they will no longer imply falsehood to me.’

‘Then, sir, if such be the case, I think you may cease to scold me with such violence.’

‘I have long felt that I ought to give you this release; for I have known that you have not thoroughly loved me.’

Miss Waddington was too proud, too conscious of the necessity to maintain her pride at the present moment to contradict this. But, nevertheless, in her heart she felt that she did love him, that she would fain not give him up, that, in spite of his anger, his bitter railing anger, she would

keep him close to her if she only could do so. But now that he spoke of giving her up, she could not speak passionately of her love—she who had never yet shown any passion in her speech to him.

‘It has grown on me from day to day ; and I have been like a child in clinging to a hope when I should have known that there was no hope. I should have known it when you deferred our marriage for three years.’

‘Two years, George.’

‘Had it been two years, we should now have been married. I should have known it when I learned that you and he were in such close intimacy in London. But now—I know it now. Now at least it is all over.’

‘I can only be sorry that you have so long had so much trouble in the matter.’

‘Trouble—trouble! But I will not make a fool of myself. I believe at any rate that you understand me.’

‘Oh! perfectly, Mr. Bertram.’

But she did not understand him ; nor perhaps was it very likely that she should understand him. What he had meant her to understand was this : that in giving her up he was sacrificing only himself, and not her ; that he did so in the conviction that she did not care for him ;

and that he did so on this account, strong as his own love still was, in spite of all her offences. This was what he intended her to understand ; —but she did not understand the half of it.

‘And I may now go?’ said she, rising from her chair. The blush of shame was over, and mild as her words sounded, she again looked the Juno. ‘And I may now go?’

‘Now go! yes; I suppose so. That is, I may go. That is what you mean. Well, I suppose I had better go.’ Not a moment since he was towering with passion, and his voice, if not loud, had been masterful, determined, and imperious. Now it was low and gentle enough. Even now, could she have been tender to him, he would have relented. But she could not be tender. It was her profession to be a Juno. Though she knew that when he was gone from her her heart would be breaking, she would not bring herself down to use a woman’s softness. She could not say that she had been wrong, wrong because distracted by her misery, wrong because he was away from her, wrong because disturbed in her spirits by the depth of the love she felt for him; she could not confess this, and then, taking his hand, promise him that if he would remain close to her she would not so sin again. Ah! if she could have done this, in one moment her head

would have been on his shoulder and his arm round her waist; and in twenty minutes more Miss Baker would have been informed, sitting as she now was up in her bedroom, that the wedding-day had been fixed.

But very different news Miss Baker had to hear. Had things turned out so, Miss Waddington would have been a woman and not a goddess. No; great as was the coming penalty, she could not do that. She had been railed at and scolded as never goddess was scolded before. Whatever she threw away, it behoved her to maintain her dignity. She would not bend to a storm that had come blustering over her so uncourteously.

Bertram had now risen to go. 'It would be useless for me to trouble your aunt,' he said. 'Tell her from me that I would not have gone without seeing her had I not wished to spare her pain. Good-bye, Caroline, and may God bless you;' and, so saying, he put out his hand to her.

'Good-bye, Mr. Bertram.' She would have said something more, but she feared to trust herself with any word that might have any sound of tenderness. She took his hand, however, and returned the pressure which he gave it.

She looked into his eyes, and saw that they were full of tears; but still she did not speak. Oh, Caroline Waddington, Caroline Waddington! if it

had but been given thee to know, even then, how much of womanhood there was in thy bosom, of warm womanhood, how little of goddess-ship, of cold goddess-ship, it might still have been well with thee! But thou didst not know. Thou hadst gotten there at any rate thy Juno's pedestal; and having that, needs was that thou shouldst stand on it.

'God bless you, Caroline; good-bye,' he repeated again, and turned to the door.

'I wish to ask you one question before you go,' she said, as his hand was on the handle of the lock; and she spoke in a voice that was almost goddess-like; that hardly betrayed, but yet that did betray, the human effort. Bertram paused, and again turned to her.

'In your accusation against me just now—'

'I made no accusation, Caroline.'

'You not only made it, Mr. Bertram, but I pleaded guilty to it. But in making it you mentioned Mr. Harcourt's name. While you were absent in Paris, I did talk with that gentleman on our private affairs, yours and mine. I hope I am believed to have done so because I regarded Mr. Harcourt as your friend?'

Bertram did not understand her, and he showed that he did not by his look.

'It is difficult for me to explain myself'—and

now she blushed slightly—very slightly. ‘What I mean is this; I wish to be acquitted by you of having had recourse to Mr. Harcourt on my own account—from any partiality of my own.’ She almost rose in height as she stood there before him, uttering these words in all her cold but beautiful dignity. Whatever her sins might have been, he should not accuse her of having dallied with another while her word and her troth had been his. She had been wrong. She could not deny that he had justice on his side—stern, harsh, bare justice—when he came there to her and flung back her love and promises into her teeth. He had the right to do so, and she would not complain. But he should not leave her till he had acquitted her of the vile, missish crime of flirting with another because he was absent. Seeing that he still hardly understood her, she made her speech yet plainer.

‘At the risk of being told again that I am unfeminine, I must explain myself. Do you charge me with having allowed Mr. Harcourt to speak to me as a lover?’

‘No; I make no such charge. Now, I have no right to make any charge on such a matter.’

‘No; should Mr. Harcourt be my lover now, that is my affair and his, not yours. But had he been so then—You owe it to me to say whether

among other sins, that sin also is charged against me ?’

‘I have charged and do charge nothing against you, but this—that you have ceased to love me. And that charge will be made nowhere but in my own breast. I am not a jealous man, as I think you might know. What I have said to you here to-day has not come of suspicion. I have thought no ill against you, and believed no ill against you beyond that which you have yourself acknowledged. I find that you have ceased to love me, and finding that, I am indifferent to whom your love may be given.’ And so saying, he opened the door and went out; nor did he ever again see Miss Waddington at Littlebath.

Some few minutes after he had left the room, Miss Baker entered it. She had heard the sound of the front door, and having made inquiry of the servant, had learned that their visitor had gone. Then she descended to her own drawing-room, and found Caroline sitting upright at the table, as though in grief she despised the adventitious aid and every-day solace of a sofa. There was no tear in her eye, none as yet; but it required no tears to tell her aunt that all was not well. Judging by the face she looked at, aunt Mary was inclined to say that all was as little well as might be.

There was still to be seen there the beauty, and the dignity, and still even in part the composure of a Juno ; but it was such composure as Juno might have shown while she devoted to a third destruction the walls of a thrice-built Troy ; of Juno in grief, in jealousy, almost in despair ; but of Juno still mindful of her pedestal, still remembering that there she stood a mark for the admiration of gods and men. How long shall this Juno mood serve to sustain her ? Ah ! how long ?

‘ Has he gone ? ’ said Miss Baker, as she looked at her niece.

‘ Yes, aunt, he has gone. ’

‘ When will he return ? ’

‘ He will not return, aunt. He will not come any more ; it is all over at last. ’

Miss Baker stood for a moment trembling, and then threw herself upon a seat. She had at least had no celestial gift by which she could compose herself. ‘ Oh, Caroline ! ’ she exclaimed.

‘ Yes, aunt Mary ; it is all over now. ’

‘ You mean that you have quarrelled ? ’ said she, remembering to her comfort, that there was some old proverb about the quarrels of lovers. Miss Baker had great faith in proverbs.

The reader may find it hard to follow Miss Baker’s mind on the subject of this engagement.

Some time since she was giving advice that it should be broken off, and now she was *au désespoir* because that result had been reached. She had one of those minds that are prone to veering, and which show by the way they turn, not any volition of their own, but the direction of some external wind, some external volition. Nor can one be angry with, or despise Miss Baker for this weathercock aptitude. She was the least selfish of human beings, the least opinionative, the most good-natured. She had had her hot fits and her cold fits with regard to Bertram; but her hot fits and her cold had all been hot or cold with reference to what she conceived to be her niece's chances of happiness. Latterly, she had fancied that Caroline did love Bertram too well to give him up; and circumstances had led her to believe more strongly than ever that old Mr. Bertram wished the marriage, and that the two together, if married, would certainly inherit his wealth. So latterly, during the last month or so, Miss Baker had blown very hot.

‘No, there has been no quarrel,’ said Caroline, with forced tranquillity of voice and manner. ‘No such quarrel as you mean. Do not deceive yourself, dear aunt; it is over now, over for ever.’

‘For ever, Caroline!’

‘Yes, for ever. That has been said which can never be unsaid. Do not grieve about it’—aunt Mary was now in tears—‘it is better so; I am sure it is better. We should not have made each other happy.’

‘But three years, Caroline; three years!’ said aunt Mary through her tears, thinking of the time that had been so sadly lost. Aunt Mary was widely awake to the fact that three years was a long period in a girl’s life, and that to have passed three years as the betrothed of one man and then to leave him was injurious to the matrimonial prospects of a young lady. Miss Baker was full of these little mundane considerations; but then they were never exercised, never had been exercised, on her own behalf.

‘Yes, three years!’ and Caroline smiled, even through her grief. ‘It cannot be helped, aunt. And the rest of it; neither can that be helped. Three years! say thirty, aunt.’

Miss Baker looked at her, not quite understanding. ‘And must it be so?’ said she.

‘Must! oh, yes, indeed it must. It must now, must—must—must.’

Then they both sat silent for awhile. Miss Baker was longing to know the cause of this sudden disruption, but she hesitated at first to inquire. It was not, however, to be borne that the

matter should be allowed to remain altogether undiscussed.

‘But what is it he has said?’ she at last asked. Caroline had never told her aunt that that letter had been shown to Mr. Harcourt, and had no intention of telling her so now.

‘I could not tell you, aunt, all that passed. It was not what he said more than what I said. At least—no; that is not true. It did arise from what he said; but I would not answer him as he would have me; and so we agreed to part.’

‘He wished to have the marriage at once?’

‘No; I think he wished no such thing. You may rest assured he wishes no marriage now; none with me, at least. And rest assured of this, too, that I wish none with him. Wish! it is no use wishing. It is now impossible.’

Again there was a silence, and again it was broken by Miss Baker. ‘I wonder whether you ever really loved him? Sometimes I have thought you never did.’

‘Perhaps not,’ said she, musing on her fate.

‘If it is never to be, I hope that you did not.’


‘It would be to be hoped—to be hoped for me, and to be hoped also for him.’

‘Oh, he loved you. There is no doubt of that; no doubt at all of that. If any man ever loved a girl, he loved you.’ To this Miss Waddington

answered nothing, nor would she just then talk any further with her aunt upon the subject. They were to dine early on that day, as their custom was when they went out in the evening. On this evening they were going to the house—lodgings rather—of an old friend they had not seen for some time. She had arrived a week or two since at Littlebath, and though there had been callings between them, they had not yet succeeded in meeting. When Bertram had arrived it was near their dinner hour and before he went that hour was already passed. Had his manner been as it ordinarily was, he would of course have been asked to join them; but, as we have seen, that had been no moment for such customary civility.

Now, however, they went to dinner, and while seated there, Miss Waddington told her aunt that she did not feel equal to going out that evening. Miss Baker of course said something in opposition to this, but that something was not much. It might easily be understood that a young lady who had just lost her lover was not in a fit state to go to a Littlebath card-party.

And thus early in the evening Caroline contrived to be alone; and then for the first time she attempted to realize all that had come upon her. Hitherto she had had to support herself—



herself and her goddess-ship,—first before George Bertram, and then with lighter effort before her aunt. But now that she was alone, she could descend to humanity. Now that she was alone she had so to descend.

Yes; she had lost three years. To a mortal goddess, who possessed her divinity but for a short time, this was much. Her doctrine had been to make the most of the world. She had early resolved not to throw away either herself or her chances. And now that she was three-and-twenty, how had she kept her resolves? how had her doctrine answered with her? She had lived before the world for the last two years as a girl betrothed to a lover—before such of the world as she knew and as knew her; and now her lover was gone; not dismissed by her, but gone! He had rather dismissed her, and that not in the most courteous manner.

But, to do her justice, this was not the grief that burnt most hotly into her heart. She said to herself that it was so, that this was her worst grief; she would fain have felt that it was so; but there was more of humanity in her, of the sweetness of womanly humanity, than she was aware. He had left her, and she knew not how to live without him. That was the thorn that

stuck fast in her woman's bosom. She could never again look into those deep, thoughtful eyes; never again feel the pressure of that strong, manly arm; never hear the poetry of that rich voice as she had heard it when he poured words of love and truth into her ear. Bertram had many faults, and while he belonged to her, she had thought of them often enough; but he had many virtues also, and now she could think but of them.

She had said that he was gone, gone for ever. It was easy enough to say that with composed voice to Miss Baker. There is nothing so easy as bravado. The wretch who is to be hung can step lightly while multitudes are looking at him. The woman who is about to give up all that her heart most values can declare out loud that the matter is very indifferent to her. But when the victim of the law is lying in his solitary cell, thinking on his doom, the morning before the executioner comes to him; when the poor girl is sitting alone on her bedside, with her heart all empty,—or rather not empty, only hopeless; it is very difficult then to maintain a spirit of bravado!

Caroline Waddington did try it. She had often said to herself, in months now some time past, that she repented of her engagement. If

so, now was the time to congratulate herself that she was free from it. But she could not congratulate herself. While he had entirely belonged to her, she had not known how thoroughly she had loved him. When she had only thought of parting with him, she had believed that it would be easy. But now she found that it was not so easy. It was about as easy for her to pluck his image from her heart as to draw one of her limbs from the socket.


But the limb had to be drawn from the socket. There was no longer any hope that it could be saved. Nay, it had been already given up as far as the expression of the will was concerned, and there was nothing left but to bear the pain.

So she sat down and began to draw out the limb. Oh, my sensitive reader! have you ever performed the process? It is by no means to be done with rose-water appliances and gentle motherly pressure. The whole force of the hospital has to be brought out to perform this operation.

She now discovered, perhaps, for the first time, that she had a strong beating heart, and that she loved this violent capricious man with every strong pulse of it. There was more about him now that was lovable by such a woman as

Caroline Waddington than when he had first spoken of his love on the side of Mount Olivet. Then he had been little more than a boy; a boy indeed with a high feeling, with a poetic nature, and much humour. But these gifts had hardly sufficed to win her heart. Now he had added to these a strong will, a power of command, a capability of speaking out to the world with some sort of voice. After all, power and will are the gifts which a woman most loves in a man.

And now that Caroline had lost her lover, she confessed to herself that she did love him. Love him! Yes! How could she recover him? That was her first thought. She could not recover him in any way. That was her second thought. As to asking him to come back to her; the wrenching of the limb from the socket would be better than that. That, at least, she knew she could not do. And was it possible that he of his own accord should come back to her? No, it was not possible. The man was tender hearted, and could have been whistled back with the slightest lure while yet they two were standing in the room together. But he was as proud as he was tender. Though there might also be some wrenching to be done within his heart, he would never come back again uninvited.



And thus, while Miss Baker was at her old friend's card-party, Miss Waddington sat in her own bedroom, striving, with bitter tears and violent struggles, to reconcile herself to her loss.

CHAPTER VI.

SIR LIONEL IN TROUBLE.

It has been said that Miss Baker was going to spend the evening with an old friend. I trust that Miss Todd, umquhile of the valley of Jehoshaphat, and now of No. 7 Paragon, Littlebath, has not been forgotten; Miss Todd of the free heart and the rosy face.


Yes, Miss Todd had come to Littlebath, and was intent rather on forming a party of Toddites than of joining herself to either of the regular sets. She was perhaps not much given to be pious, and she certainly was but ill inclined to be slow. If fast, however, she chose to be fast in her own line.

But before we have the pleasure of attending at her *soirée*, we must say a word or two of one of the most distinguished of the expected guests. Sir Lionel was to be there.

Now Sir Lionel had been leading a pleasant

life at Littlebath, with one single exception—that he was rather in want of funds. He had capital apartments, four rooms *ensuite*, a man-servant, a groom, three horses, and a phaeton, and no one was more looked up to at Littlebath. Ladies smiled, young men listened, old gentlemen brought out their best wines, and all was delightful. All but this, that the ‘*res angusta*’ did occasionally remind him that he was mortal. Oh, that sordid brother of his, who could have given him thousands on thousands without feeling the loss of them! We have been unable to see much of old Mr. Bertram in recapitulating the story of young Mr. Bertram’s latter doings. But it should have been said, that early in the present year he had not been quite as well as his friends could wish. George had gone to see him once or twice, and so also had his niece Miss Baker, and his granddaughter. He had said but very little to them; but on Miss Baker’s mind an impression had been left that it would please him to see the marriage completed.

And at this time likewise his brother, Sir Lionel, had thought it expedient to see him. There had hitherto been no interview between them since Sir Lionel’s return. The colonel had found out, and had been duly astonished at finding out, the history of Miss Baker and her niece.



That George and Caroline would be the heirs to a great portion of his brother's money he could not doubt; that Miss Baker would have something he thought probable; and then he reflected, that in spite of all that was come and gone, his brother's heart might relent on his death-bed. It might be that he could talk the sick man round; and if that were impracticable, he might at least learn how others stood in his brother's favour. Sir Lionel was not now a young man himself. Ease and a settled life would be good for him. What, if he married Miss Baker!

He first called on Pritchett. Mr. Pritchett told him that his brother was better—considerably better. Sir Lionel was in raptures. He had hurried up from Littlebath in an agony. He had heard most distressing accounts. He would however go down to Hadley and see his brother.

'I am afraid Mr. Bertram is not very much up to company just at present,' wheezed out Mr. Pritchett.

'But a brother, you know,' suggested Sir Lionel.

Pritchett knew exactly how the brothers stood with each other; and he himself, though he was very partial to Mr. George, had not any warm love for Sir Lionel.

‘ Oh, yes ; a brother is a brother, surely. But, Mr. Bertram, you know, sir—’

‘ You mean,’ said Sir Lionel, ‘ that he is a little vexed about the account.’

‘ Oh, yes, the account ; there is the account, Sir Lionel. If it is to settle that, perhaps I can manage without troubling you to go to Hadley. Not but what settling the account *will* make matters smoother.’

Sir Lionel could get nothing more from Mr. Pritchett ; but he would not be put off from his intention, and he did go to Hadley. He found his brother sitting up in the dining-room, but he would not have known him. And, indeed, many who had seen him lately might have had some difficulty in recognizing him. He was not only lean and lank, and worn and wan, but he spoke with some difficulty, and on close examination it might be seen that his mouth was twisted as it were from the centre of his face. Since his relatives had seen him he had suffered what is genteelly called a slight threatening of paralysis.

But his mind, if touched at all, had recovered itself ; and his spirit was in nowise paralyzed. When Sir Lionel was shown into the room—he had first of all taken the precaution of sending down his card from the hotel, and saying that he would call in half an hour—the old man put out

his hand to him, but did not attempt to rise from his chair. It must be remembered that the brothers had not seen each other for more than fifteen years.

Sir Lionel had tutored himself carefully as to what he would say and what do. 'George,' he said, and the old man shrank as he heard the unaccustomed name. 'When I heard that you were ill, I could not but come and see you.'


'Very good of you, Sir Lionel; very good of you,' growled the old man.

'It is fifteen years since we met, and we are both old men now.'

'I am an old man now, and nearly worn out; too old and far gone to have many wants. You are not in that condition, I suppose.'

There was an amount of sarcasm in his voice as he spoke, and in his eye also as he looked at his brother, which made Sir Lionel perfectly understand that his rich relative was not specially anxious to be kind to him.

'Well, we are neither of us quite so far gone as that, I hope—not quite so far gone as that;' and Sir Lionel looked very pleasant. 'But, speaking for myself, I have not many wants now'—nor had he, pleasant old man that he was; only three or four comfortable rooms for himself and his servant; a phaeton and a pair of horses; and



another smaller establishment in a secluded quiet street; nothing more than that, including of course all that was excellent in the eating and drinking line—‘speaking for myself, I have not many wants now.’ And he did look very good-humoured and pleasant as he spoke.

Mr. Bertram senior did not look good-humoured or pleasant. There was that in his old eye which was the very opposite to good-humour and pleasantness.

‘Ah!’ said he. ‘Well I am glad of that, for you will be able to do the more for poor George. He will have wants; he is going to take care and trouble on himself. Neither he nor his sweetheart have, I take it, been accustomed to do without wants; and their income will be tight enough—forby what you can do for them.’

The colonel sat and still looked pleasant, but he began to think that it might be as well for him that he was back at Littlebath.

‘Poor George! I hope they will be happy. I think they will; my greatest anxiety now is of course for their happiness; and yours is the same, doubtless. It is odd that my child and your child’s child should thus come together, is it not?’ so spoke the colonel.

Mr. Bertram looked at him; looked through him almost, but he said nothing.

‘It is odd,’ continued Sir Lionel, ‘but a very happy circumstance. She is certainly the sweetest girl I ever saw ; and George is a lucky fellow.’

‘Yes, he is a lucky fellow ; he will get more than he has any right to expect. First and last she will have six thousand pounds. I have not heard him say what he means to settle on her ; but perhaps he was waiting till you had come home.’

Sir Lionel’s forte during his whole official career had been the making pleasant—by the pleasantness that was innate in him—things which appeared to be going in a very unpleasant manner. But how was he to make things pleasant now ?

‘Well, you see, George has been so much knocked about ! There was his fellowship. I think they behaved shabbily enough to him.’

‘Fellowship ! One hundred and seventy pounds a year and the run of his teeth at feast time, or some such thing as that. A man can’t marry on his fellowship very well !’

‘Ha ! ha ! ha ! no, he can’t exactly do that. On the whole, I think it was quite as well that he threw it up ; and so I told him.’

‘Did you tell him at the same time what his future income was to be ?’

‘No, upon my soul I did not; but if all I hear be true, I believe you did. You have been exceedingly generous to him, George—and to me also.’

‘Then, Sir Lionel, allow me to tell you that all you hear is not true. Anything at all that you may have heard of that kind, if you have heard anything, is perfectly false. I have said nothing to George about his income, and have nothing to say to him.’

‘Well, I may have expressed myself wrongly, and perhaps you did say nothing. I was alluding especially to what you have done.’

‘I will tell you exactly what I have done. I thought he showed a high spirit when he threw up his fellowship, and as I had always a great contempt for those Oxford fellows, I sent him a thousand pounds. It was a present, and I hope he will make good use of it.’

‘I am sure he will,’ said Sir Lionel, who certainly had just cause for such confidence, seeing how large a slice out of the sum had been placed at his own disposal.

‘I am sure he will,’ said Sir Lionel. ‘Indeed, I know that he has.’

‘Ah, I’m glad to hear of it; of course you know more about it than I do; of course you are arranging these matters. But that is all he

has had from me, and all that he is likely to have.'

If such were to be the treatment of George, of George who was certainly in some respects a favourite, what hope could Sir Lionel have for himself? But it was not so much his brother's words which led him to fear that his brother's money-bags were impregnable to him as his brother's voice and his brother's eye. That eye was never off him, and Sir Lionel did begin to wish that he was at Littlebath.

'I don't know whether George may have formed any hopes,' continued the old man; but here Sir Lionel interrupted him, and not imprudently: if anything was to be said, it should be said now.

'Well, if he has formed hopes, George, you cannot but own that it is natural. He has looked on you as a man without any child of your own, and he has been taught so to look by your treating him almost as though he were your son.'

'You mean that I paid his school debts and his Oxford debts when you forgot to do so,' growled out the elder brother.

'Yes, and that you afterwards gave him an income when he came up to live in London. I hope you do not think that I am ungrateful;

George?' and Sir Lionel used his softest and, at the same time, his most expressive tone.

'Grateful! I seldom look for much gratitude. But I shall be glad to know when it may suit you to settle with me. The account has been running on now for a great many years. Probably Pritchett may have sent it you.' And as he spoke Mr. Bertram rose from his chair and took an ominous-looking piece of paper from off the mantelpiece.

'Yes, Mr. Pritchett is punctuality itself in these matters,' said Sir Lionel, with a gentle laugh, which had not about it all his usual pleasantness.

'You have probably checked it, and can say whether or no it be correct,' said Mr. Bertram senior, looking at the paper in his hand.

'Well, I can't say that I have exactly; but I don't in the least doubt the figures, not in the least; Mr. Pritchett is always correct, I know.'

'Yes, Mr. Pritchett is generally correct. And may I ask, Sir Lionel, what you intend to do in the matter?'

It was necessary now that Sir Lionel should summon up his best courage. He reminded himself that after all his brother was but a feeble old man—impotent in all but money; and as it seemed now clear that no further pecuniary aid

was to be expected, why need he fear him on this account? Had it been possible for him to get away without further talk, he would have done so; but this was not possible, so he determined to put a good face on it.

‘I suppose you are joking now, George,’ said he.

I wish I could describe the tone of voice in which the word joking was repeated by the elder Mr. Bertram. It made the military knight jump in his chair, and confess to himself that the word impotent could not be safely applied to his ancient relative.

‘Well, I dare say it is a joke,’ the old man went on to say. ‘If I expect to be paid what I have expended in saving George from being turned loose upon the world without education, I suppose it is a joke. Ha! ha! ha! I never thought of laughing at it before, but now I will. I always heard that you were a joker, Sir Lionel. Ha! ha! ha! I dare say you have laughed at it often enough yourself, eh?’

‘What I mean is this, when you took upon yourself George’s education and maintenance, you could hardly have intended to have it paid back again by such a poor devil as I am.’

‘Oh, I couldn’t, couldn’t I?’

‘At any rate, I don’t suppose you did count on having your money back.’

‘Well, I must admit this, I did not feel very sure of it; I did think there might be a doubt. But what could I do? I could not let poor Wilkinson ruin himself because you would not pay your debts.’

‘I am sorry that you take it up in such a manner,’ said the colonel, assuming a tone of injured innocence. ‘I came here because I heard that you were ill—’

‘Thought I was dying, eh?’

‘I did not exactly think that you were dying, George; but I knew that you were very ill, and old feelings came back on me. The feelings of our early youth, George; and I could not be happy without seeing you.’

‘Very kind of you, I am sure. You altogether decline then to settle the account, eh?’

‘If you desire it, I will—will make arrangements, certainly; you do not want it all at once, I suppose?’

‘Oh, no; half in three months, and other half in six will do for me.’

‘It would take a great deal more than all my income to do that, I fear.’

‘Your professional income; yes, I suppose it would. I fear they don’t give you five or six thousand a year for staying at home at Littlebath. But surely you must have saved money; you

must have intended to do something for your son ?'

'I have looked upon him as provided for by his uncle.'

'Oh !'

'And have therefore been satisfied that he would do well.'

'Now, Sir Lionel, I will tell you how the matter is. I know you will never repay me a shilling of this money, and therefore I shall tell Pritchett not to bother himself with sending you any more accounts.'

'He is a worthy man, and I am sorry he should have had so much trouble.'

'So am I, very ; but that's done. He has had the trouble, and I've paid the money ; and, as far as George is concerned, I do not begrudge it.'

'You would not if you knew what his sentiments are.'

'I don't care a fig for his sentiments.'

'His feelings of gratitude to you are very strong.'

'No, they are not. He is not in the least grateful to me, nor do I wish him to be so. He is an honest lad, with a high spirit, a good heart, and a bad head. Sometimes I have thought of making him my heir.'

'Ah !' sighed Sir Lionel.

‘But I have now firmly made up my mind to do no such thing. He has no knowledge of the worth of money. He does not value money.’

‘Oh, there you mistake him; indeed, you do.’

‘He would do no good with it; and, as regards mine, he won’t have it.’ Sir Lionel’s face again became very doleful.

‘But who will have it, George? Whom else have you got to leave it to?’

‘When I want to consult you on that subject, I’ll send for you; just at present I have no wish to do so. And now, if you please, we’ll say no more about money.’

Nothing more was said about money, and very little on any other subject. On what other subject could a pleasant votary of pleasure, such as Sir Lionel, wish to hold conversation with a worn-out old miser from the city? He had regarded his brother as a very full sponge, from which living water might probably be squeezed. But the sponge, it seemed, was no longer squeezable by him in any way. So he left Hadley as quickly as he could, and betook himself to Littlebath with a somewhat saddened heart. He consoled himself, however, by reflecting that an old man’s whims are seldom very enduring, and that George might yet become a participator in the

huge prize ; if not on his own account, at least on that of his wife.

Sir Lionel returned to Littlebath, resolving that come what might he would not again have personal recourse to his brother. He had tried his diplomatic powers and had failed—failed in that line on being successful in which he so pre-eminently piqued himself. In Ireland it is said of any man who is more than ordinarily persuasive, that he can ‘talk the devil out of the liver wing of a turkey!’ Sir Lionel had always supposed himself to be gifted with this eloquence ; but in that discourse at Hadley, the devil had been too stout for him, and he had gone away without any wing at all—liver or other.

On one point on which he had been very anxious to say a word or two, he had been unable to introduce the slightest hint. He had not dreamt that it would be possible to ask his brother in so many words whether or no Miss Baker would be made a participator in the great prize ; but he had imagined that he might have led the way to some conversation which would have shown what were the old man’s feelings with reference to that lady. But, as the reader will have perceived, he had not been able to lead the conversation in any way ; and he had left Hadley without further light for the guidance of

his steps in that matrimonial path in which he had contemplated the expediency of taking a leisurely evening stroll.

The wicked old miser had declared that George should not be his heir; and had also said that which was tantamount to a similar declaration regarding Caroline. She would have six thousand pounds, first and last. Nothing more than a beggarly six thousand pounds, of which two-thirds were already her own without thanks to any one. What a wretched old miser! Who then would have his money? It would hardly be possible that he would leave it all to Miss Baker. And yet he might. It was just possible. Anything was possible with a capricious miserly old fool like that. What a catch would it be if he, Sir Lionel, could become the heir in so deliciously easy a manner!

But, in all probability, anything the old man might say was exactly the opposite of that which he intended to do. He probably would leave his money to George—or very probably to Caroline; but most probably he would do something for Miss Baker; something handsome for that soft, obedient handmaid who had never disobeyed any of his commands; and, better still, had never drawn upon him for more than her regular allowance.

Such were Sir Lionel's thoughts as he made his way back to Littlebath. Yes; he would make himself acceptable to Miss Baker. That George, old George, was not long for this world was very evident to the colonel. He, troublesome old cross-grained churl that he was, would soon be out of the way. Such being certain—all but certain—could not Sir Lionel manage matters in this way? Could he not engage himself to the lady while his brother was yet alive, and then marry her afterwards—marry her, or perhaps not marry her, as might then become expedient? He was well sure of this, that if she promised to marry him before her acquisition of fortune, such acquisition would not induce her to break off from the match. 'She is too true, too honourable for that,' said Sir Lionel to himself, feeling a warm admiration for the truth of her character, as he resolved how he might himself best back out of such an engagement in the event of its being expedient for him so to do.

So passed his thoughts as he made his way back to Littlebath. And when there he did not allow idleness to mar his schemes. He immediately began to make himself pleasant—more than ordinarily pleasant to Miss Baker. He did not make love to her after the manner of his youth. Had he done so, he would only have

frightened the gentle lady. But he was assiduous in his attentions, soft and sweetly flattering in his speech, and friendly, oh, so friendly, in his manner ! He called almost every day at Montpellier Crescent. To be sure, there was nothing unnatural in this, for was he not about to become the father of his dear Caroline ? But dear to him as his dear Caroline might be, his softest whispers, his most sugared words, were always for her aunt.

He had ever some little proposition to make, some kind family suggestion to put forward. He was a man of the world ; they were ladies, delicate, unfit for coping with the world, necessarily ignorant of its naughtier, darker ways ; he would do everything for them : and by degrees he did almost everything for Miss Baker.

And so that lady was charmed without knowing it. Let us do her full justice. She had not the remotest idea of opening a flirtation with Sir Lionel Bertram. She had looked on him as the future father-in-law of her own dear child ; never as anything more : no idea of becoming Lady Bertram had ever for an instant flashed upon her imagination. But, nevertheless, by degrees the warrior's attentions became pleasant to her.

She had had no youthful adorers, this poor, good Miss Baker ; never, at least, since she had

been merry as other children are, 'when her little lovers came.' She had advanced to her present nearly mature age without perhaps feeling the want of them. But, nevertheless, even in her bosom was living the usual feminine passion for admiration. She was no '*lusus naturæ*,' but a woman with a heart, and blood in her veins; and not as yet a very old woman either. And therefore, though she had no idea that Sir Lionel was her lover, she had learned to be fond of him.

Her little conversations with Caroline on this subject were delightful. The younger lady was certainly the sharper of the two; and though she had her own concerns to occupy her, she was able to see that something might perhaps be intended. Her liking for Sir Lionel was by no means a strong passion. Something probably had passed between her and George; for George could keep no secret from her. At any rate, she suspected the knight, but she could not say anything to put her aunt on her guard beyond using cold expressions in speaking of her future father. But Miss Baker, who suspected nothing, who expected nothing, could not be too lavish in her praises.

'Caroline,' she would say, 'I do think you are so happy in having such a father-in-law.'

'Oh, certainly,' Caroline had answered. 'But, for myself, I think more of my father-in-law's son.'



‘Oh, of course you do ; I know that. But Sir Lionel is such a perfect gentleman. Did you ever know a gentleman of his age so attentive to ladies as he is ?’

‘Well, perhaps not ; except one or two old men whom I have seen making love.’

‘That’s a very different sort of thing, you know—that’s absurd. But I must say I think Sir Lionel’s behaviour is perfect.’ What would she have said of Sir Lionel’s behaviour had she known all the secrets of his establishments ?


And thus, partly on Sir Lionel’s account, Miss Baker began in these days to have perhaps her hottest fit, her strongest wish with reference to her niece’s marriage. And then just at this hottest moment came the blow which has been told of in the last chapter.

But Miss Baker, as she prepared herself for Miss Todd’s party, would not believe that the matter was hopeless. The quarrels of lovers have ever been the renewal of love, since the day when a verb between two nominative cases first became possessed of the power of agreeing with either of them. There is something in this sweet easiness of agreement which seems to tend to such reconciliations. Miss Baker was too good a grammarian to doubt the fact.

She would probably, under existing circum-

stances, have stayed at home with her niece, but that she knew she should meet Sir Lionel at Miss Todd's party. She was very anxious to learn whether Sir Lionel had heard of this sad interruption to their harmony; anxious to hear what Sir Lionel would say about it; anxious to concert measures with Sir Lionel for repairing the breach—that is, if Sir Lionel should appear to be cognizant that the breach existed. If she should find that he was not cognizant, she would not tell him; at least she thought she would not. Circumstances must of course govern her conduct to a certain degree when the moment of meeting should arrive. And so Miss Baker went to the party, certainly with a saddened heart, but comforted in some degree by the assurance that she would meet Sir Lionel. 'Dear Sir Lionel, what a thing it is to have a friend,' she said to herself as she stepped into the fly. Yes, indeed, the best thing in the world—the very best. But, dear Miss Baker, it is of all things the most difficult to acquire—and especially difficult for both ladies and gentlemen after forty years of age.

In the meantime, Sir Lionel had been calling on Miss Todd—had heard a good deal about Miss Todd; and was strong at heart, as a man is strong who has two good strings to his bow.



CHAPTER VII.

MISS TODD'S CARD-PARTY.

YES. The great Miss Todd had arrived at Littlebath, and had already been talked about not a little. Being a maiden lady, with no family but her one own maid, she lived in lodgings of course. People at Littlebath, indeed, are much given to lodgings. They are mostly a come-and-go class of beings, to whom the possession of furniture and the responsibilities of householding would be burdensome. But then Miss Todd's lodgings were in the Paragon, and all the world knows how much it costs to secure eligible rooms in the Paragon: two spacious sitting-rooms, for instance, a bedroom, and a closet for one's own maid. And Miss Todd had done this in the very best corner of the Paragon; in that brazen-faced house which looks out of the Paragon right down Montpellier Avenue as regards the front windows; and from the back fully commands the entrance

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to the railway station. This was Mrs. O'Neil's house; and, as Mrs. O'Neil herself loudly boasted when Miss Todd came to inspect the premises, she rarely took single ladies, or any ladies that had not handles to their names. Her very last lodger had been Lady McGuffern, the widow of the medical director of the great Indian Eyesore district, as Mrs. O'Neil called it. And Lady McGuffern had paid her, oh! ever so much per week; and had always said on every Saturday—'Mrs. O'Neil, your terms for such rooms as these are much too low.' It is in such language that the widows of Scotch doctors generally speak of their lodgings when they are paying their weekly bills.

And these rooms Miss Todd had secured. She had, moreover, instantly sent for Mr. Wutsanbeans, who keeps those remarkably neat livery stables at the back of the Paragon, and in ten minutes had concluded her bargain for a private brougham and private coachman in demi-livery at so much per week. 'And very wide awake she is, is Miss Todd,' said the admiring Mr. Wutsanbeans, as he stood among his bandy-legged satellites. And then her name was down at the assembly-rooms, and in the pump-room, and the book-room, and in the best of sittings in Mr. O'Callaghan's fashionable church, in almost

less than no time. There were scores of ladies desirous of being promoted from the side walls to the middle avenues in Mr. O'Callaghan's church ; for, after all, what is the use of a French bonnet when stuck under a side wall ? But though all these were desirous, and desirous in vain, Miss Todd at once secured a place where her head was the cynosure of all the eyes of the congregation. Such was Miss Todd's power, and therefore do we call her great.

And in a week's time the sound of her loud but yet pleasant voice, and the step of her heavy but yet active foot, and the glow of her red cherry cheek were as well known on the esplanade as though she were a Littlebathian of two months' standing. Of course she had found friends there, such friends as one always does find at such places—dear delightful people whom she had met some years before for a week at Ems, or sat opposite to once at the hotel table at Harrowgate for a fortnight. Miss Todd had a very large circle of such friends ; and, to do her justice, we must say that she was always glad to see them, and always treated them well. She was ready to feed them at all times ; she was not candid or malicious when backbiting them ; she never threw the burden of her pleasures on her friends' shoulders—as ladies at Littlebath will sometimes

do. She did not boast either of her purse or her acquaintance; and as long as she was allowed to do exactly what she liked she generally kept her temper. She had an excellent digestion, and greatly admired the same quality in other people. She did not much care what she said of others, but dearly liked to have mischief spoken of herself. Some one once had said—or very likely no one had said it, but a *souppçon* of a hint had in some way reached her own ears—that she had left Torquay without paying her bills. It was at any rate untrue, but she had sedulously spread the report; and now wherever she ordered goods, she would mysteriously tell the tradesman that he had better inquire about her in Devonshire. She had been seen walking one moonlight night with a young lad at Bangor: the lad was her nephew; but some one had perhaps jested about Miss Todd and her beau, and since that time she was always talking of eloping with her own flesh and blood.

But Miss Todd was not a bad woman. She spent much in feeding those who perhaps were not hungry; but she fed the hungry also: she indulged a good deal in silk brocades; but she bought gingham as well, and calicos for poor women, and flannel petticoats for motherless girls. She did go to sleep sometimes in church,

and would sit at a whist-table till two o'clock of a Sunday morning; but having been selected from a large family by an uncle as his heir, she had divided her good things with brothers and sisters, and nephews and nieces. And so there were some hearts that blessed her, and some friends who loved her with a love other than that of her friends of Littlebath and Ems, of Jerusalem and Harrowgate.

And she had loved in her early days, and had been told and had believed that she was loved. But evidence had come to her that her lover was a scamp—a man without morals and without principle; and she had torn herself away from him. And Miss Todd had offered to him money compensation, which the brute had taken; and since that, for his sake, or rather for her love's sake, she had rejected all further matrimonial tenders, and was still Miss Todd: and Miss Todd she intended to remain.

Being such as she was, the world of Littlebath was soon glad to get about her. Those who give suppers at their card-parties are not long in Littlebath in making up the complement of their guests. She had been there now ten days, and had already once or twice mustered a couple of whist-tables; but this affair was to be on a larger scale.

Miss Baker she had not yet seen, nor Miss

Waddington. The ladies had called on each other, but had missed fire on both occasions; but with Sir Lionel she had already renewed her intimacy on very affectionate terms. They had been together for perhaps three days at Jerusalem, but then three days at Jerusalem are worth a twelvemonth in such a dull, slow place as London. And Sir Lionel, therefore, and Miss Todd had nearly rushed into each other's arms; and they both, without any intentional falsehood, were talking of each other all over Littlebath as old and confidential friends.

And now for Miss Todd's party. Assist me, my muse. Come down from heaven, O, Calliope my queen! and aid me to spin with my pen a long discourse. Hark! do you hear? or does some fond delusion mock me? I seem to hear, and to be already wandering through those sacred recesses—the drawing-rooms, namely, at Littlebath—which are pervious only to the streams and breezes of good society.

Miss Todd stood at her drawing-room door as her guests were ushered in, not by the greengrocer's assistant, but by the greengrocer himself in person. And she made no quiet little curtsies, whispered no unmeaning welcomes with bated breath. No; as they arrived she seized each Littlebathian by the hand, and shook

that hand vigorously. She did so to every one that came, rejoiced loudly in the coming of each, and bade them all revel in tea and cake with a voice that demanded and received instant obedience.

'Ah, Lady Longspade! this is kind. I am delighted to see you. Do you remember dear Ems, and the dear Kursaal? Ah, me! Well, do take some tea now, Lady Longspade. What, Miss Finesse—well—well—well. I was thinking of Ostend only the other day. You'll find Flounce there with coffee and cake and all that. You remember my woman, Flounce, don't you? Mrs. Fuzzybell, you really make me proud. But is not Mr. Fuzzybell to be here? Oh, he's behind is he? well—I'm so glad. Ha! ha! ha! A slow coach is he? I'll make him faster. But perhaps you won't trust him to me, I'm such a dangerous creature. I'm always eloping with some one. Who knows but I might go off with Mr. Fuzzybell? We were near it you know at the end of that long walk at Malvern—only he seemed too tired—ha! ha! ha! There's tea and cake there, Mrs. Fuzzybell. My dear Sir Lionel, I am delighted. I declare you are five years younger—we are both five years younger than when we were at Jerusalem.'

And so forth. But Sir Lionel did not pass on

to the tea-tables as did the Finesses and the Longspades. He remained close at Miss Todd's elbow, as though his friendship was of a more enduring kind than that of others, as though he were more to Miss Todd than Mrs. Fuzzybell, nearer than Miss Ruff who had just been assured at her entrance that the decks should be made ready for action almost at once. A lion-hearted old warrior was Miss Ruff,—one who could not stand with patience the modern practice of dallying in the presence of her enemies' guns. She had come there for a rubber of whist—to fight the good fight—to conquer or to die, and her soul longed to be at it. Wait but one moment longer, Miss Ruff, and the greengrocer and I will have done with our usherings, and then the decks shall be cleared.

But we must certainly do the honours for our old friend Miss Baker. Miss Todd, when she saw her, looked as though she would have fallen on her neck and kissed her; but she doubtless remembered that their respective head-dresses might suffer in the encounter.

'At last, dear Miss Baker; at last! I am so delighted; but where is Miss Waddington? where is the bride-elect?' These last words were said in a whisper which was not perhaps quite as plainly audible at the other side of the

Paragon as were the generality of Miss Todd's speeches. 'Indisposed! Why is she indisposed? you mean that she has love-letters to write. I know that is what you mean.' And the roar again became a whisper fit for Drury Lane. 'Well, I shall make a point of seeing her to-morrow. Do you remember Jehoshaphat, dear Jehoshaphat?' And then having made her little answers, Miss Baker also passed on, and left Miss Todd in the act of welcoming the Rev. Mr. O'Callaghan.

Miss Baker passed on, but she did so slowly. She had to speak to Sir Lionel, who kept his place near Miss Todd's shoulder; and perhaps she had some secret hope—no, not hope; some sort of an anticipation—that her dear friend would give her the benefit of his arm for a few moments. But Sir Lionel did nothing of the kind. He took her hand with his kindest little squeeze, asked with his softest voice after his dear Caroline, and then let her pass on by herself. Miss Baker was a bird easily to be lured to her perch,—or to his. Sir Lionel felt that he could secure her at any time. Therefore, he determined to attach himself to Miss Todd for the present. And so Miss Baker walked on alone, perhaps a little piqued at being thus slighted.

It was a strange sight to see the Rev. Mr. O'Callaghan among that worldly crowd of pleasure-seeking sinners. There were, as we have said, three sets of people at Littlebath. That Miss Todd, with her commanding genius and great power of will, should have got together portions of two of them was hardly to be considered wonderful. Both the fast and heavy set liked good suppers. But it did appear singular to the men and women of both these sets that they should find themselves in the same room with Mr. O'Callaghan.

Mr. O'Callaghan was not exactly the head and font of piety at Littlebath. It was not on his altars, not on his chiefly, that hecatombs of needlework were offered up. He was only senior curate to the great high-priest, to Dr. Snort himself. But though he was but curate, he was more perhaps to Littlebath—to his especial set in Littlebath—than most rectors are to their own people.

Mr. O'Callaghan was known to be condescending and mild under the influence of tea and muffins—sweetly so if the cream be plentiful and the muffins soft with butter; but still, as a man and a pastor, he was severe. In season and out of season he was hot in argument against the devil and all his works. He was always fighting

the battle with all manner of weapons. He would write letters of killing reproach to persons he had never known, and address them by post to—

‘John Jones, Esq.,
The Sabbath-breaker,
5 Paradise Terrace,
Littlebath.’

or—

‘Mrs. Gambler Smith,
2 Little Paragon,
Littlebath.’

Nothing was too severe for him. One may say that had he not been a clergyman, and therefore of course justified in any interference, he would have been kicked from Littlebath to London and back again long since. How then did it come to pass that he was seen at Miss Todd's party? The secret lay in Miss Todd's unbounded power. She was not as other Littlebathians. When he unintentionally squeezed her hand, she squeezed his in return with somewhat of a firmer grasp. When, gently whispering, he trusted that she was as well in spirit as in body, she answered aloud—and all the larger Paragon heard her—that she was very well in both, thank God. And then, as her guests pressed in, she passed him on rapidly to the tea and

cake, and to such generous supplies of cream as Mrs. Flounce, in her piety, might be pleased to vouchsafe to him.

‘What, Mr. O’Callaghan!’ said Sir Lionel into Miss Todd’s ear, in a tone of well-bred wonder and triumphant admiration. ‘Mr. O’Callaghan among the sinners! My dear Miss Todd, how will he like the whist-tables?’

‘If he does not like them, he must just do the other thing. If I know anything of Miss Ruff, a whole college of O’Callaghans would not keep her from the devil’s books for five minutes longer. Oh, here is Lady Ruth Revoke, my dear Lady Ruth, I am charmed to see you. When, I wonder, shall we meet again at Baden Baden? Dear Baden Baden! Flounce, green tea for Lady Ruth Revoke.’ And so Miss Todd continued to do her duty.

What Miss Todd had said of her friend was quite true. Even then Miss Ruff was standing over a card-table, with an open pack in her hands, quite regardless of Mr. O’Callaghan. ‘Come, Lady Longspade,’ she said, ‘we are wasting time sadly. It is ever so much after nine. I know Miss Todd means us to begin. She told me so. Suppose we sit down?’

But Lady Longspade merely muttered something and passed on. In the first place, she was

not quite so eager as was Miss Ruff; and in the next, Miss Ruff was neither the partner nor the opponent with whom she delighted to co-operate. Lady Longspade liked to play first-fiddle at her own table; but Miss Ruff always played first-fiddle at her table, let the others be whom they might; and she very generally played her tunes altogether 'con spirito.'

Miss Ruff saw how Lady Longspade passed on, but she was nothing disconcerted. She was used to that, and more than that. 'Highty-tighty!' was all she said. 'Well, Mrs. Garded, I think we can manage without her ladyship, can't we?' Mrs. Garded said that she thought they might indeed, and stood by the table opposite to Miss Ruff. This was Mrs. King Garded, a widow of great Littlebathian repute, to whom as a partner over the green table few objected. She was a careful, silent, painstaking player, one who carefully kept her accounts, and knew well that the monthly balance depended mainly, not on her good, but on her bad hands. She was an old friend, and an old enemy of Miss Ruff's. The two would say very spiteful things to each other, things incredible to persons not accustomed to the card-tables of Littlebath. But, nevertheless, they were always willing to sit together at the same rubber.

To them came up smirking little Mr. Fuzzybell. Mr. Fuzzybell was not great at whist, nor did he much delight in it; but, nevertheless, he constantly played. He was taken about by his wife to the parties, and then he was always caught and impaled, and generally plucked and skinned before he was sent home again. He never disported at the same table with his wife, who did not care to play either with him or against him; but he was generally caught by some Miss Ruff, or some Mrs. King Garded, and duly made use of. The ladies of Littlebath generally liked to have one black coat at the table with them. It saved them from that air of destitution which always, in their own eyes, attaches to four ladies seated at a table together.

‘Ah, Mr. Fuzzybell,’ said Miss Ruff, ‘you are the very person we are looking for. Mrs. Garded always likes to have you at her table. Sit down, Mr. Fuzzybell.’ Mr. Fuzzybell did as he was told, and sat down.

Just at this moment, as Miss Ruff was looking out with eager eyes for a fourth who would suit her tastes, and had almost succeeded in catching the eye of Miss Finesse—and Miss Finesse was a silent, desirable, correct player—who should walk up to the table and absolutely sit down

but that odious old woman, Lady Ruth Revoke ! It was Mrs. Garded's great sin, in Miss Ruff's eye, that she toadied Lady Ruth to such an extent as to be generally willing to play with her. Now it was notorious in Littlebath that she had never played well, and that she had long since forgotten all she had ever known. The poor old woman had already had some kind of a fit ; she was very shaky and infirm, and ghastly to look at, in spite of her paint and ribbons. She was long in arranging her cards, long in playing them ; very long in settling her points, when the points went against her, as they generally did. And yet, in spite of all this, Mrs. King Garded would encourage her because her father had been Lord Whitechapel !

There was no help for it now. There she was in the chair ; and unless Miss Ruff was prepared to give up her table and do something that would be uncommonly rude even for her, the rubber must go on. She was not prepared at any rate to give up her table, so she took up a card to cut for partners. There were two to one in her favour. If fortune would throw her ladyship and Mr. Fuzzybell together there might yet be found in the easiness of the prey some consolation for the slowness of the play.

They cut the cards, and Miss Ruff found her-

self sitting opposite to Lady Ruth Revoke. It was a pity that she should not have been photographed. 'And now, Mr. Fuzzybell,' said Mrs. King Garded, triumphantly.

But we must for awhile go to other parts of the room. Lady Longspade, Mrs. Fuzzybell, and Miss Finesse soon followed the daring example of Miss Ruff, and seated themselves with some worthy fourth compatriot.

'Did you see Miss Ruff?' said Lady Longspade, whose ears had caught the scornful high-tighty of the rejected lady. 'She wanted to get me at her table. But no, I thank you. I like my rubber too, and can play it as well as some other people. But it may cost too dear, eh, Mrs. Fuzzybell? I have no idea of being scolded by Miss Ruff.'

'No, nor I,' said Mrs. Fuzzybell. 'I hate that continual scolding. We are playing only for amusement; and why not play in good temper?'—nevertheless Mrs. Fuzzybell had a rough side to her own tongue. 'It is you and I, Miss Finesse. Shillings, I suppose, and—' and then there was a little whispering and a little grinning between Lady Longspade and Mrs. Fuzzybell, the meaning of which was, that as the occasion was rather a special one, they would indulge themselves with half-a-crown on the rubber and sixpence each

hand on the odd trick. And so the second table went to work.

And then there was a third, and a fourth, and a fifth. Miss Ruff's example was more potent than Mr. O'Callaghan's presence in that assembly. That gentleman began to feel unhappy as there was no longer round him a crowd of listening ladies sufficient to screen from his now uninquiring eyes the delinquencies of the more eager of the sinners. The snorting of the war-horse and the sound of the trumpet had enticed away every martial bosom, and Mr. O'Callaghan was left alone in converse with Mrs. Flounce.

He turned to Miss Todd, who was now seated near enough to the door to do honour to any late arriving guest, but near enough also to the table to help herself easily to cake. His soul burned within him to utter one anathema against the things that he saw. Miss Todd was still not playing. He might opine that she objected to the practice. Sir Lionel was still at her back; he also might be a brand that had been rescued from the burning. At a little distance sat Miss Baker; he knew that she at any rate was not violently attached to cards. Could he not say something? Could he not lift up his voice, if only for a moment, and speak forth as he so

loved to do, as was his wont in the meetings of the saints, his brethren?

He looked at Miss Todd, and he raised his eyes, and he raised his hands, but the courage was not in him to speak. There was about Miss Todd as she stood, or as she sat, a firmness which showed itself even in her rotundity, a vigour in the very rubicundity of her cheek which was apt to quell the spirit of those who would fain have interfered with her. So Mr. O'Callaghan, having raised his eyes considerably, and having raised his hands a little, said nothing.

'I fear you do not approve of cards?' said Miss Todd.

'Approve! oh no, how can I approve of them, Miss Todd?'

'Well, I do with all my heart. What are old women like us to do? We haven't eyes to read at night, even if we had minds fit for it. We can't always be saying our prayers. We have nothing to talk about except scandal. It's better than drinking; and we should come to that if we hadn't cards.'

'Oh, Miss Todd!'

'You see you have your excitement in preaching, Mr. O'Callaghan. These card-tables are our pulpits; we have got none other. We haven't children, and we haven't husbands. That is, the

most of us. And we should be in a lunatic asylum in six weeks if you took away our cards. Now, will you tell me, Mr. O'Callaghan, what would you expect Miss Ruff to do if you persuaded her to give up whist ?

'She has the poor with her always, Miss Todd.'

'Yes, she has ; the woman that goes about with a clean apron and four borrowed children ; and the dumb man with a bit of chalk and no legs, and the very red nose. She has these, to be sure, and a lot more. But suppose she looks after them all the day, she can't be looking after them all the night too. The mind must be un-bent sometimes, Mr. O'Callaghan.'

'But to play for money, Miss Todd ! Is not that gambling ?'

'Well, I don't know. I can't say what gambling is. But do you sit down and play for love, Mr. O'Callaghan, and see how soon you'll go to sleep. Come, shall we try ? I can have a little private bet, just to keep myself awake, with Sir Lionel, here.'

But Mr. O'Callaghan declined the experiment. So he had another cup of tea and another muffin, and then went his way ; regretting sorely in his heart that he could not get up into a high pulpit and preach at them all. However, he consoled

himself by 'improving' the occasion on the following Sunday.

For the next fifteen minutes Sir Lionel stood his ground, saying soft nothings to Miss Todd, and then he also became absorbed among the rubbers. He found that Miss Todd was not good at having love made to her in public. She was very willing to be confidential, very willing to receive flattery, attentions, hand-pressings, and the like. But she would make her confidences in her usual joyous, loud voice; and when told that she was looking remarkably well, she would reply that she always did look well at Littlebath, in a tone that could not fail to attract the attention of the whole room. Now Sir Lionel would fain have been a little more quiet in his proceedings, and was forced to put off somewhat of what he had to say till he could find Miss Todd alone on the top of a mountain. 'Twas thus at least that he expressed his thoughts to himself in his chagrin, as he took his place opposite to Mrs. Shortpointz at the seventh and last establishment now formed in the rooms.


The only idlers present were Miss Baker and Miss Todd. Miss Baker was not quite happy in her mind. It was not only that she was depressed about Caroline: her firm belief in the grammatical axiom before alluded to lessened her grief on that score. But the conduct of Sir

Lionel made her uncomfortable ; and she began to find, without at all understanding why, that she did not like Miss Todd as well as she used to do at Jerusalem. Her heart took Mr. O'Callaghan's side in that little debate about the cards ; and though Sir Lionel, in leaving Miss Todd, did not come to her, nevertheless the movement was agreeable to her. She was not therefore in her very highest spirits when Miss Todd came and sat close to her on the sofa.

'I am so sorry you should be out,' said Miss Todd. 'But you see, I've had so much to do at the door there, that I couldn't see who was sitting down with who.'

'I'd rather be out,' said Miss Baker. 'I am not quite sure that Mr. O'Callaghan is not right.' This was her revenge.

'No ; he's not a bit right, my dear. He does—just what the man says in the rhymes—what is it? you know—makes up for his own little peccadilloes by damning yours and mine. I forget how it goes. But there'll be more in by-and-by, and then we'll have another table. Those who come late will be more in your line ; not so ready to peck your eyes out if you happen to forget a card. That Miss Ruff is dreadful.' Here an awful note was heard, for the Lady Ruth had just put her thirteenth trump on Miss Ruff's thirteenth.



heart. What Littlebathian female soul could stand that unmoved?

‘Oh, dear! that poor old woman!’ continued Miss Todd. ‘You know one lives in constant fear of her having a fit. Miss Ruff is horrible. She has a way of looking with that fixed eye of hers that is almost worse than her voice.’ The fact was, that Miss Ruff had one glass eye. ‘I know she’ll be the death of that poor old creature some of these days. Lady Ruth will play, and she hardly knows one card from another. And then Miss Ruff, she will scold. Good heavens! do you hear that?’

‘It’s just seven minutes since I turned the last trick of the last hand,’ Miss Ruff had said, scornfully. ‘We shall have finished the two rubbers about six in the morning, I take it.’

‘Will your ladyship allow me to deal for you?’ said Mr. Fuzzybell, meaning to be civil.

‘I’ll allow you to do no such thing,’ croaked out Lady Ruth. ‘I can deal very well myself; at any rate as well as Miss Ruff. And I’m not the least in a hurry;’ and she went on slobbering out the cards, and counting them over and over again, almost as each card fell.

‘That’s a double and a treble against a single,’ said Lady Longspade, cheerfully, from another table; ‘six points, and five—the other rubber—

makes eleven ; and the two half-crowns is sixteen, and seven odd tricks is nineteen and six. Here's sixpence, Mrs. Fuzzybell ; and now we'll cut again.'

This was dreadful to Miss Ruff. Here had her rival played two rubbers, won them both, pocketed all but a sovereign, and was again at work ; while she, she was still painfully toiling through her second game, the first having been scored against her by her partner's fatuity in having trumped her long heart. Was this to be borne with patience ? ' Lady Ruth,' she said, emitting fire out of her one eye, ' do you ever mean to have done dealing those cards ?'

Lady Ruth did not condescend to make any answer, but recommenced her leisurely counting ; and then Miss Ruff uttered that terrific screech which had peculiarly excited Miss Todd's attention.

' I declare I don't like it at all,' said the tender-hearted Miss Baker. ' I think Mr. O'Callaghan was quite right.'

' No, my dear, he was quite wrong, for he blamed the use of cards, not the abuse. And after all, what harm comes of it ? I don't suppose Miss Ruff will actually kill her. I dare say if we were playing ourselves we shouldn't notice it. Do you play cribbage ? Shall we have a little

cribbage?' But Miss Baker did not play cribbage; or, at any rate, she said that she did not.

'And do tell me something about dear Caroline,' continued Miss Todd. 'I am so anxious to see her. But it has been a very long engagement, hasn't it? and there ought to be lots of money, oughtn't there? But I suppose it's all right. You know I was very much in love with young Bertram myself; and made all manner of overtures to him, but quite in vain; ha! ha! ha! I always thought him a very fine fellow, and I think her a very lucky girl. And when is it to be? And, do tell me, is she over head and ears in love with him?'

What was Miss Baker to say to this? She had not the slightest intention of making Miss Todd a confidante in the matter: certainly not now, as that lady was inclined to behave so very improperly with Sir Lionel; and yet she did not know how to answer it.

'I hope it won't be put off much longer,' continued Miss Todd. 'Is any day fixed yet?'

'No; no day is fixed yet,' replied Miss Baker, blushing.

Miss Todd's ear was very quick. 'There is nothing the matter, I trust. Well, I won't ask any questions, nor say a word to anybody. Come, there is a table vacant, and we will cut in.' And

then she determined that she would get it all out from Sir Lionel.

The parties at some of the tables were now changed, and Miss Baker and Miss Todd found themselves playing together. Miss Baker, too, loved a gentle little rubber, if she could enjoy it quietly, without fear of being gobbled up by any Ruff or any Longspade; and with Miss Todd she was in this matter quite safe. She might behave as badly as had the Lady Ruth, and Miss Todd would do no worse than laugh at her. Miss Todd did not care about her points, and at her own house would as soon lose as win; so that Miss Baker would have been happy had she not still continued to sigh over her friend's very improper flirtation with Sir Lionel.

And thus things went on for an hour or so. Every now and again a savage yell was heard from some ill-used angry lady, and low growls, prolonged sometimes through a whole game, came from different parts of the room; but nobody took any notice of them; 'twas the manner at Littlebath: and, though a stranger to the place might have thought, on looking at those perturbed faces, and hearing those uncourteous sounds, that there would be a flow of blood—such a flow as angry nails may produce—the denizens of the place knew better. So the rubbers

went on with the amount of harmony customary to the place.

But the scene would have been an odd one for a non-playing stranger, had a non-playing stranger been there to watch it. Every person in the room was engaged at whist except Mrs. Flounce, who still remained quiescent behind her tea and cakes. It did not happen that the party was made up of a number of exact fours. There were two over; two middle-aged ladies, a maiden and a widow: and they, perhaps more happy than any of the others, certainly more silent for neither of them had a partner to scold, were hard at work at double-dummy in a corner.

It was a sight for a stranger! It is generally thought that a sad *ennui* pervades the life of most of those old ladies in England to whom fate has denied the usual cares and burdens of the world, or whose cares and burdens are done and gone. But there was no *ennui* here. No stockjobber on 'Change could go about his exciting work with more animating eagerness. There were those who scolded, and those who were scolded. Those who sat silent, being great of mind, and those who, being weak, could not restrain their notes of triumph or their notes of woe; but they were all of them as animated and intense as a tiger springing at its prey. Watch the gleam of joy

that lights up the half-dead, sallow countenance of old Mrs. Shortpointz as she finds the ace of trumps at the back of her hand, the very last card. Happy, happy Mrs. Shortpointz! Watch the triumph which illumines even the painted cheeks and half-hidden wrinkles of Lady Longspade as she brings in at the end of the hand three winning little clubs, and sees kings and queens fall impotent at their call. Triumphant, successful Lady Longspade! Was Napoleon more triumphant, did a brighter glow of self-satisfied inward power cross his features, when at Ulm he succeeded in separating poor Mack from all his friends?

Play on ladies. Let us not begrudge you your amusements. We do not hold with pious Mr. O'Callaghan, that the interchange of a few six-pences is a grievous sin. At other hours ye are still soft, charitable, and tender-hearted; tender-hearted as English old ladies are, and should be. But, dear ladies, would it not be well to remember the amenities of life—even at the whist-table?

So things went on for an hour or so, and then Miss Baker and Sir Lionel again found themselves separated from the card-tables, a lonely pair. It had been Sir Lionel's cue this evening to select Miss Todd for his special attentions; but he had found Miss Todd at the present moment

to be too much a public character for his purposes. She had a sort of way of speaking to all her guests at once, which had doubtless on the whole an extremely hilarious effect, but which was not flattering to the *amour propre* of a special admirer. So, *faute de mieux*, Sir Lionel was content to sit down in a corner with Miss Baker. Miss Baker was also content; but she was rather uneasy as to how she should treat the subject of Caroline's quarrel with her lover.

'Of course you saw George to-day?' she began.

'Yes, I did see him; but that was all. He seemed to be in a tremendous hurry, and said he must be back in town to-night. He's not staying, is he?'

'No; he's not staying.'

'I didn't know: when I saw that dear Caroline was not with you, I thought she might perhaps have better company at home.'

'She was not very well. George went back to London before dinner.'

'Nothing wrong, I hope?'

'Well, no; I hope not. That is—you haven't heard anything about it, have you, Sir Lionel?'

'Heard anything! No, I have heard nothing; what is it?'

It may be presumed that such a conversation

as this had not been carried on in a very loud tone; but, nevertheless, low as Miss Baker had spoken, low as Sir Lionel had spoken, it had been too loud. They had chosen their places badly. The table at which Lady Ruth and her party were sitting—we ought rather to say, Miss Ruff and her party—was in one corner of the room, and our friends had placed themselves on a cushioned seat fixed against the wall in this very corner. Things were still going badly with Miss Ruff. As Sindbad carried the old man, and could not shake him off, so did Miss Ruff still carry Lady Ruth Revoke; and the weight was too much for her.

She manfully struggled on, however—womanfully would perhaps be a stronger and more appropriate word. She had to calculate not only how to play her own hand correctly, but she had also to calculate on her partner's probable errors. This was hard work, and required that all around her should be undisturbed and silent. In the midst of a maze of uncontrollable difficulties, the buzz buzz of Miss Baker's voice fell upon her ears, and up she rose from her chair.

'Miss Todd,' she said, and Miss Todd, looking round from a neighbouring table, shone upon her with her rosy face. But all the shining was of no avail.

‘Miss Todd, if this is to be a conversazione, we had better make it so at once. But if it’s whist, then I must say I never heard so much talking in my life!’

‘It’s a little of both,’ said Miss Todd, not *sotto voce*.

‘Oh, very well; now I understand,’ said Miss Ruff; and then she resumed her work and went on with her calculations.

Miss Baker and Sir Lionel got up, of course, and going over to the further part of the room continued their conversation. She soon told him all she knew. She had hardly seen George herself, she said. But Caroline had had a long interview with him, and on leaving him had said that all—all now was over.

‘I don’t know what to make of it,’ said Miss Baker, with her handkerchief to her eyes. ‘What do you think, Sir Lionel? You know they say that lovers always do quarrel, and always do make it up again.’

‘George is a very headstrong fellow,’ said Sir Lionel.

‘Yes, that is what I have always felt; always. There was no being sure with him. He is so wild, and has such starts.’

‘Has this been his doing?’

‘Oh, yes, I think so. Not but that Caroline is

very spirited too: I suppose somehow it came about between them.'

'He was tired of waiting.'

'That might have been a reason twelve months ago, but there was to be no more delay now; that is as I understood it. No, it has not been that, Sir Lionel. It makes me very unhappy, I know;' and Miss Baker again used her handkerchief.

'You mustn't distress yourself, my dearest friend,' said Lionel. 'For my sake, don't. Oh, if you knew how it pains me to see you suffering in that way! I think more of you in the matter than even of George; I do indeed.' And Sir Lionel contrived to give a little pinch to the top of one of Miss Baker's fingers—not, however, without being observed by the sharp eyes of his hostess.

'But, Caroline!' sobbed Miss Baker, behind her handkerchief. She was nicely ensconced in the depth of a lounging-chair, so that she could turn her face from the card-tables. It is so sweet to be consoled in one's misery, especially when one really believes that the misery is not incurable. So that on the whole Miss Baker was not unhappy.

'Yes, dear Caroline,' said Sir Lionel; 'of course I can say nothing till I have heard more

of the matter. But do you think Caroline really loves him? Sometimes I have thought—'

'So have I, sometimes; that is I used. But she does love him, Sir Lionel; that is, if I know anything about it.'

'Ah, dearest friend, do you know anything about it? that is the very question I want to ask you. Do you know anything about it? Sometimes I have thought you knew nothing. And then sometimes I have thought, been bold enough to think—' And Sir Lionel looked intently at the handkerchief which covered her face; and Miss Todd looked furtively, ever and anon, at Sir Lionel. 'I declare I think it would do very well,' said Miss Todd to herself good-naturedly.

Miss Baker did not quite understand him, but she felt herself much consoled. Sir Lionel was a remarkably handsome man; as to that she had made up her mind long since: then he was a peculiarly gentlemanlike man, a very friendly man, and a man who exactly suited all her tastes. She had for some weeks past begun to think the day tedious in which she did not see him; and now it was driven in upon her mind that conversation was a much pleasanter occupation than whist; that is, conversation with so highly-polished a man as Sir Lionel Bertram. But, nevertheless, she did not quite understand what

he meant, nor did she know how she ought to answer it. Why need she answer him at all? Could she not sit there, wiping her eyes softly and comfortably, and listen to what might come next?

‘I sometimes think that some women never love,’ said Sir Lionel.

‘Perhaps they don’t,’ said Miss Baker.

‘And yet in the depth of many a heart there may be a fund of passion.’

‘Oh, there may, certainly,’ said Miss Baker.

‘And in your own, my friend? Is there no such fund there? Are there no hidden depths there unexplored, still fresh, but still, perhaps still to be reached?’

Again Miss Baker found it easiest to lie well back into her chair, and wipe her eyes comfortably. She was not prepared to say much about the depths of her own heart at so very short a notice.

Sir Lionel was again about to speak—and who can say what might have come next, how far those hidden depths might have been tried?—when he was arrested in the midst of his pathos by seeing Mrs. Garded and Mr. Fuzzybell each rush to a shoulder of Lady Ruth Revoke. The colonel quitted his love for the moment, and hurried to the distant table; while Miss Baker,

removing her handkerchief, sat up and gazed at the scene of action.

The quarrelling had been going on unabated, but that had caused little surprise. It is astonishing how soon the ear becomes used to incivilities. They were now accustomed to Miss Ruff's voice, and thought nothing of her exclamations. 'Well, I declare—what, the ten of spades!—ha! ha! ha! well, it is an excellent joke—if you could have obliged me, Lady Ruth, by returning my lead of trumps, we should have been out,' &c., &c., &c. All this and more attracted no attention, and the general pity for Lady Ruth had become dead and passive.

But at last Miss Ruff's tongue went faster and faster, and her words became sharper and sharper. Lady Ruth's countenance became very strange to look at. She bobbed her head about slowly in a manner that frightened Mr. Fuzzybell, and ceased to make any remark to her partner. Then Mrs. Garded made two direct appeals to Miss Ruff for mercy.

But Miss Ruff could not be merciful. Perhaps on each occasion she refrained for a moment, but it was only for a moment; and Mrs. Garded and Mr. Fuzzybell ceased to think of their cards, and looked only at the Lady Ruth; and then of a sudden they both rose from their seats, the colonel,

as we have said, rushed across the room, and all the players at all the tables put down their cards and stood up in alarm.

Lady Ruth was sitting perfectly still, except that she still bobbed her old head up and down in a strange unearthly manner. She had about ten cards in her hand which she held motionless. Her eyes seemed to be fixed in one continued stare directly on the face of her foe. Her lower jaw had fallen so as to give a monstrous extension to her cadaverous face. There she sat apparently speechless; but still she bobbed her head, and still she held her cards.

It was known at Littlebath that she had suffered from paralysis, and Mrs. Garded and Mr. Fuzzybell thinking that she was having or about to have a fit, naturally rushed to her assistance.

‘What is the matter with her?’ said Miss Ruff.
‘Is anything the matter with her?’

Miss Todd was now at the old lady’s side. ‘Lady Ruth,’ said she, ‘do you find yourself not well? Shall we go into my room? Sir Lionel, will you help her ladyship?’ And between them they raised Lady Ruth from her chair. But she still clutched the cards, still fixed her eyes on Miss Ruff, and still bobbed her head.

‘Do you feel yourself ill, Lady Ruth?’ said

Miss Todd. But her ladyship answered nothing.

It seemed, however, that her ladyship could walk, for with her two supporters she made her way nearly to the door of the room. There she stood, and having succeeded in shaking off Sir Lionel's arm, she turned and faced round upon the company. She continued to bob her head at them all, and then made this little speech, uttering each word very slowly.

'I wish she had a glass tongue as well, because then perhaps she'd break it.' And having so revenged herself, she suffered Miss Todd to lead her away into the bedroom. It was clear at least that she had no fit, and the company was thankful.

Sir Lionel, seeing how it was, left them at the door of the bedroom, and a few minutes afterwards Miss Todd, Mrs. Flounce, and Lady Ruth's own maid succeeded in getting her into a cab. It is believed that after a day or two she was none the worse for what had happened, and that she made rather a boast of having put down Miss Ruff. For the moment, Miss Ruff was rather put down.

When Miss Todd returned to the drawing-room that lady was sitting quite by herself on an ottoman. She was bolt upright, with her hands

before her on her lap, striving to look as though she were perfectly indifferent to what had taken place. But there was ever and again a little twitch about her mouth, and an involuntary movement in her eye which betrayed the effort, and showed that for this once Lady Ruth had conquered. Mr. Fuzzybell was standing with a frightened look at the fireplace; while Mrs. King Garded hung sorrowing over her cards, for when the accident happened she had two by honours in her own hand.

When Miss Todd returned some few of her guests were at work again; but most of the tables were broken up. 'Poor dear old lady,' said Miss Todd, 'she has gone home none the worse. She is very old, you know, and a dear good creature.'

'A sweet dear creature,' said Mrs. Shortpointz, who loved the peerage, and hated Miss Ruff.

'Come,' said Miss Todd, 'Parsnip has got a little supper for us downstairs; shall we go down? Miss Ruff, you and I will go and call on Lady Ruth to-morrow. Sir Lionel, will you give your arm to Lady Longspade? Come, my dear;' and so Miss Todd took Miss Baker under her wing, and they all went down to supper. But Miss Ruff said not another word that night.

‘Ha! ha!’ said Miss Todd, poking her fan at Miss Baker, ‘I see all about it, I assure you; and I quite approve.’

Miss Baker felt very comfortable, but she did not altogether understand her friend’s joke.

CHAPTER VIII.

THREE LETTERS.


GEORGE BERTRAM, as we have seen, returned to town after his interview with Miss Waddington without seeing his father. Neither to his mind nor to hers was any comfort brought by that grammatical rule in which Miss Baker had found so much consolation. For both of them the separation was now a thing completed. Each knew enough of the other to feel that that other's pride was too high to admit of his or her making any first fresh advancement.

George endeavoured to persuade himself that he was glad of what he had done; but he failed utterly. He had loved her, did love her dearly, and found that he never valued her as he did now. She had behaved shamefully to him. He said that to himself over and over again. But what had that to do with love? He did not love her the less because she had made public his

letter, the secrets of his heart, that which should have been as private as the passion of her own bosom. He could not love her less because she talked over these with another man, however much he might feel himself bound to cast her off for doing so. So he shut himself up in his chambers; wrote pages for his new book that were moody, misanthropical, and unbelieving; and on the whole was very unhappy.

Nor was Caroline much better able to bear the shock; though with her there was more propriety of demeanour under the blow, and a better mental control. That was of course, for she was a woman—and being a woman, she had to take care that the world knew nothing of what was going on within her heart.

For two days she remained perfectly calm. She allowed herself no vent whatever for her feelings. She made the breakfast; sat close at her tambour frame, or more frequently close at her book; read aloud to her aunt; went out and made calls; and attended minutely to all the ordinary occupations of her life. Her aunt never once caught her with a tear in her eye, never saw her sitting thoughtful, unoccupied, with her head leaning on her arm. Had she done so, she would have spoken to her about George. As it was, she did not dare to do so. There was during



these days, and indeed outwardly for many days afterwards, an iron stubbornness about Caroline which frightened Miss Baker and altogether prevented her from alluding to the possibility of a reconciliation. Nothing could be more gentle, nay, more obedient, than Caroline's manner and way with her aunt at this time: she yielded to her in everything; but her aunt perceived that all utterance as to the one subject which was nearest to both their hearts was effectually forbidden.

Caroline allowed two whole days to pass before she would allow herself to think of what had taken place. She read through half the nights, so as to secure sleep for herself when she lay down. But on the third morning she opened her desk in her own room, and sat down and wrote to Adela Gauntlet.

‘ Littlebath, Friday.

‘ Dearest Adela,

‘ An occurrence has taken place of which I have not yet allowed myself to think, and which I shall first realize and bring home to myself in writing to you; and yet before it happened I had thought of it very often—even talked of it with aunt Mary; and sometimes thought of it and talked of it as though it were

almost desirable. I wish I may teach myself so to think of it now.

‘ All is over between me and Mr. Bertram. He came down here on Tuesday and told me so. I do not blame him. Nor can I blame him ; not at least for what he has done, though his manner in doing it was very harsh.

‘ I would tell you all if I could, but it is so hard in a letter. I wish you were here. But no ; you would drive me mad by advice which I could not, would not take. Last summer, when I was so unhappy in London, aunt and I had some conversation about our affairs with a person there. Mr. Bertram heard of this while he was in Paris. He did not approve of it ; and he wrote me, oh ! such a letter. I should have thought it impossible for him to have written such words to me. I was mad with grief, and I showed this letter to the same person. There, Adela, I must tell you all. It was Mr. Harcourt, George’s intimate friend. George particularly begged me in that letter not to talk to him any more ; and yet I did this. But I was half frenzied with grief ; and why was I to obey one who had no right to command me, and who made his commands so harsh ? His request would have been a law to me.

‘ But I know I was wrong, Adela. I have

known it every minute since I showed the letter. I was sure I was wrong, because I could not tell him that I had done so. It made me afraid of him, and I never before was afraid of any one. Well; I did not tell him, and now he has found it out. I would not condescend to ask him how; but I think I know. This at least I know, that he did so in no ignoble way, by no mean little suspicions. He did not seek to discover it. It had come upon him like a great blow, and he came at once to me to learn the truth. I told him the truth, and this has been the end of it.

‘Now you know it all; all except his look, his tone, his manner. These I cannot tell you—cannot describe. I seem now to know him better, understand him more thoroughly than ever I did. He is a man for a tender-hearted woman to love to madness. And I— Ah! never mind, dearest; I think—nay, I am sure I can get over it. You never could. Yes; he is a man for a woman to worship; but yet he is so rough, so stern, so harsh in his anger. He does not measure his words at all. I don’t think he knows the kind of things he says. And yet the while his heart is so tender, so soft; I could see it all. But he gives one no time to acknowledge it—at least, he gave me none. Were you ever scolded, upbraided, scorned by a man you loved?

and did you ever feel that you loved him the better for all his scorn? I felt so. I could so feel, though it was impossible to confess it. But he was wrong there. He should not have upbraided me unless he intended to forgive. I think I have read that it is not kingly for a king to receive a suppliant for pardon unless he intends to forgive. I can understand that. If his mind was made up to condemn me altogether, he should have written and so have convicted me. But in such matters he considers nothing. He acts altogether from the heart.

‘I am, however, sure of this, dear Adela, that it is all better as it is. There; with you, I will scorn all falsehood. For once, and, if possible, only for once, the truth shall stand out plainly. I love him as I never, never can love another man. I love him as I never thought to love any man. I feel at this moment as though I could be content to serve him as his menial. For she who is his wife must so serve him—and how long should I be content to do so?’

‘But yet I wrong him in this. He is most imperious, absolutely imperious—must be altogether master in all things; that is what I mean. But to one who loved him well, and would permit this, he would be the tenderest, gentlest, most loving of masters. He would not permit the

wind to blow too harshly on his slave. I have loved him well, but I could not permit this. I could not permit it for a whole lifetime; and therefore it is well that we have parted.


‘ You will hardly believe this of him, for he seems in general company to be so good-humoured. With people that are indifferent to him, no man is less exacting; but with those near to him in life he never bends, not an inch. It is this that has estranged his uncle from him. But yet how noble, how grand a man he is! To all pecuniary considerations he is absolutely indifferent. A falsehood, even a concealment, is impossible with him. Who that either of us knows is equal to or approaches him in talent? He is brave, generous, simple-hearted beyond all that I have ever known. Who is like him? And yet——. To you, once for all, I say all this. But, Adela, do not take advantage of me. You ought to know that were it not all over, I should not say it.

‘ I wish that you had been betrothed to him. Oh, how I wish it! You are not worldly, as I am; not stubborn, nor proud of heart. Not that you have not pride, a truer, better pride. You could have brought yourself to submit, to be guided, to be a secondary portion of himself—and then how he would have loved you!

‘ I have often wondered that he should have

thought of me. No two persons were ever less suited for each other. I knew that when I accepted him, foolishly accepted him because I liked him, and now I am rightly punished. But, ah! that he should be punished too! for he is punished. I know he loves me; though I know nothing would now induce him to take me. And I know this also, that nothing—nothing—nothing would induce me to be so taken. Not if he were begging—as he never will beg to any woman. I would be too true to him, too true to what I now know to be his happiness.

‘As for me, I dare say I shall marry yet. I have some little money, and that sort of manner which many men think most becoming for the top of their tables and the management of their drawing-rooms. If I do, there shall be no deceit. I certainly shall not marry for love. Indeed, from early years I never thought it possible that I should do so. I have floundered unawares into the pitfall, and now I must flounder out. I have always thought that there was much in the world well worth the living for besides love. Ambition needs not be a closed book for women, unless they choose to close it. I do not see but that a statesman’s wife may stand nearly as high in the world as the statesman stands himself. Money, position, rank are worth the having—at any rate,



the world thinks so, or why else do they so scramble for them? I will not scramble for them; but if they come in my way, why, I may probably pick them up.

‘ This will be odious to you. I know it will. A potato-paring and a true heart are your beautiful for this world. I am made of viler stuff. I have had the true heart, and see what I have made of it!

‘ You will answer me, of course. I could find it in my heart to beg you not to do so, only now I could not afford to think that you were cold to me. I know you will write to me; but, pray, pray do not advise me to submit myself to him under the idea that a reconciliation is possible. A reconciliation is not possible, and I will not submit myself to him. I know I speak the truth when I say that our marriage is not to be desired. I acknowledge his merits; I confess his superiority: but these very merits, this great superiority, make it impossible that I should suit him as a wife.

‘ On that matter I have made up my mind. I will never marry him. I only say this to deter you from wasting your energy in endeavouring to bring us again together. I know very well that I shall not be asked—that his mind is equally firm.

‘ And now, good-bye. You know all my heart, and, as far as I can tell them, all my feelings. A long letter from you will give me much delight if you will comply with my earnest request.

‘ This letter has been a very selfish one, for it is all about myself. But you will forgive that now. God bless you.

‘ Your affectionate friend,

‘ CAROLINE.

‘ P.S. I have said nothing to aunt Mary, except to tell her that the match is broken off; and she has kindly—so kindly, abstained from any questions.’

Adela Gauntlet was all alone when she received this letter at West Putford. In these days she generally was all alone. That she should answer it, answer it at once, was of course certain. But how should she answer it? Her mind was soon made up, with many tears, partly for her friend and partly for herself. Caroline’s happiness had been, nay, probably still was, in her own hands, and she was going to throw it away. For herself, happiness had never been within her own reach. ‘Be his menial servant!’ she repeated to herself, as she read and re-read the letter. ‘Yes; of course she should if he

required it. It would be for her to make him know that she could be something better to him !

Her judgment was soon formed. She condemned Caroline altogether on Caroline's own showing. In such matters one woman almost always condemns another. She took no notice of the allusion to Bertram's harshness; she almost overlooked the generosity with which her friend had written of the lover who had rejected her. She only saw Caroline's great fault. How could she have brought herself to talk with Mr. Harcourt—with a young unmarried man—on such a subject? And, oh! how was it possible that she could have brought herself to show him such a letter? She wrote her answer that same night, as follows:—

‘ West Putford, Saturday night.

‘ Dearest Caroline,

‘ Your letter has made me most unhappy. I almost think that I have suffered more in reading it than you did in writing it. You have made a request to me with which I cannot, will not comply. I can only write to you the truth, as I think it. What else can I write? How can I frame my letter in any other way?

‘ But I will acknowledge this, that it is useless for me to suggest anything to you as to your

own happiness. But there is more than that to be thought of. There is that which you are bound to think of before that. Whether you have broken with Mr. Bertram or not, there has been that between you which makes it your duty in this matter to regard his happiness as your first consideration.

‘Dearest, dearest Caroline, I fear that you have been wrong throughout in this affair. I do not dread your being angry with me for saying so. In spite of what you say, I know your heart is so warm that you would be angry with me if I blamed him. You were wrong in talking to Mr. Harcourt; doubly wrong in showing to him that letter. If so, is it not your business to put that wrong right? to remedy if you can the evil that has come of it?’

‘I feel quite sure that Mr. Bertram loves you with all his heart, and that he is one who will be wretched to his heart’s core at losing what he loves. It is nothing to say that it is he who has rejected you. You understand his moods; even I understand them well enough to know in what temper that last visit was made. Answer this to yourself. Had you then asked his pardon, do you not know that he would have given it you with a rapture of joy? Do you not feel that he was then at that moment only too anxious to for-

give ? And are you, you who have sinned against him, are you to let him break his heart against a rock, because you are too proud to own to him the fault which you acknowledge to yourself ? Is that your return for the love which he has borne you ?

‘You wish that he had loved me, you say. Do not wish away the sweetest gift which God can give to a woman in this world. It was not possible that I should have loved him. It is quite impossible now that you should not do so.

‘Try to think in this affair with severity towards yourself, and ask yourself what justice requires of you. My advice to you is to write to him. Tell him, with frank humility and frank affection, that you ask his pardon for the injury that you had done him. Say no more than that. If it shall still please him to consider that the engagement between you is at an end, such an acknowledgment from you will in no way constrain him to violate that resolve. But if he relent—and I know that this other “if” will be the true one—the first train that runs will bring him back to you ; and he, who I am sure is now wretched, will again be happy ; ah ! happier than he has been for so long.

‘I implore you to do this, not for your own

sake, but for his. You have done wrong, and it is he that should be considered. You will think what will be your sufferings if he does not notice your letter; should he not be softened by your humility. But you have no right to think of that. You have done him wrong, and you owe him reparation. You cannot expect that you should do wrong and not suffer.

‘I fear I have written savagely. Dear, dear Caroline, come to me here, and I will not talk savagely. I too am not happy. I have not my happiness so much in my own hands as you have. Do come to me. Papa will be delighted to see you. I am sure Miss Baker could spare you for a fortnight. Do, do come to

‘Your true friend,

‘ADELA.’

There was much of craft in Adela Gauntlet’s letter; but if craft could ever be pardonable, then was hers pardonable in this case. She had written as though her sole thought was for Mr. Bertram. She had felt that in this way only could she move her friend. In her mind—Adela’s mind—it was a settled conviction, firm as rocks, that as Caroline and Mr. Bertram loved each other, neither of them could be happy unless they were brought together. How could she

best aid in doing this? That had been her main thought, and so thinking, she had written this letter, filled to overflowing with womanly craft.

And her craft was nearly successful; but only nearly; that was all. Caroline sat in her solitude and cried over this letter till her eyes were weary with tears. She strove, strove valiantly to take her friend's advice; strove to do so in spite of all her former protestations. She got pen and ink and sat herself down to write the letter of humiliation; but the letter would not be written; it was impossible to her; the words would not form themselves: for two days she strove, and then she abandoned the task as for ever hopeless. And thus this third short epistle must be laid before the reader.

'I cannot do it, Adela. It is not in my nature. You could do it, because you are good, and high, and pure. Do not judge others by yourself. I cannot do it, and will not madden myself by thinking of it again. Good-bye; God bless you. If I could cure your grief I would come to you; but I am not fit. God in his own time will cure yours, because you are so pure. I could not help you, nor you me; I had better, therefore, remain where I am. A thousand thousand kisses. I love you so now, because you and you only know my

secret. Oh, if you should not keep it! But I know you will; you are so true.'

This was all. There was no more; no signature. 'May God help them both!' said Adela as she read it.

CHAPTER IX.

BIDDING HIGH.

I HOPE to press all the necessary records of the next three or four months into a few pages. A few pages will be needed in order that we may know how old Mr. Bertram behaved when he heard of this rupture between his nephew and his granddaughter.

George, when he found himself back in town, shut himself up in his chambers and went to work upon his manuscript. He, too, recognized the necessity of labour, in order that the sorrow within his heart might thus become dull and deadened.

But it was deep, true sorrow—to him at some periods almost overwhelming : he would get up from his desk during the night, and throwing himself on the sofa, lie there writhing in his agony. While he had known that Caroline was his own, he had borne his love more patiently than does many a man of less intensity of feeling. He had

been much absent from her; had not abridged those periods of absence as he might have done; had, indeed, been but an indifferent lover, if eagerness and *empressement* are necessary to a lover's character. But this had arisen from two causes, and lukewarmness in his love had not been either of them. He had been compelled to feel that he must wait for the fruition of his love; and therefore had waited. And then he had been utterly devoid of any feeling of doubt in her he loved. She had decided that they should wait. And so he had waited as secure away from her as he could have been with her.

But his idea of a woman's love, of the purity and sanctity of her feelings, had been too high. He had left his betrothed to live without him, frequently without seeing him for months, and yet he had thought it utterly impossible that she should hold confidential intercourse with another man. We have seen how things fell out with him. The story need not be repeated. He was shocked, outraged, torn to the heart's core; but he loved as warmly, perhaps more warmly than ever.

What he now expected it is impossible to describe; but during that first fortnight of seclusion in the midst of London, he did half expect, half hope that something would turn up. He

waited and waited, still assuring himself that his resolve was inviolable, and that nothing should make him renew his engagement: and yet he hoped for something. There was a weight on his heart which then might have been removed.

But no sign was made. We have seen how Adela, who felt for him, had striven in vain. No sign was made; and at the end of the fortnight he roused himself, shook his mane, and asked himself what he should do.

In the first place, there should be no mystery. There were those among his friends to whom he had felt himself bound to speak of his engagement when it was made, and to them he felt himself bound to communicate the fact now that it was unmade. He wrote accordingly to Arthur Wilkinson; he wrote to Harcourt; and determined to go down to Hadley. He would have written also to his uncle, but he had never done so, and hardly knew how to commence a correspondence.

His letter to Harcourt had been a difficult task to him, but at last it was finished in a very few words. He did not at all refer to what had taken place at Richmond, or allude in any way to the nature of the cause which had produced this sudden disrapture. He merely said that his engagement with Miss Waddington was broken

off by mutual consent, and that he thought it best to let his friend know this in order that mistakes and consequent annoyance might be spared. This was very short ; but, nevertheless, it required no little effort in its accomplishment.

On the very next day Harcourt came to him at his chambers. This surprised him much. For though he had no intention of absolutely quarrelling with the rising legal luminary, he had taught himself to look upon any renewal of their real intimacy as out of the question. They were sailing on essentially different tacks in their life's voyages. They had become men of different views in everything. Their hours, their habits, their friends, their ways were in all things unlike. And then, moreover, Bertram no longer liked the successful barrister. It may be said that he had learned positively to dislike him. It was not that Harcourt had caused this wound which was tearing his heart to pieces ; at least, he thought that it was not that. He declared to himself a dozen times that he did not blame Harcourt. He blamed no one but Caroline—her and himself. Nor was it because the man was so successful. Bertram certainly did not envy him. But the one as he advanced in manhood became worldly, false, laborious, exact, polished, rich, and agreeable among casual acquaintances. The other was the

very reverse. He was generous and true; but idle—idle at any rate for any good; he was thoughtful, but cloudy in his thoughts, indifferent as to society, poor, much poorer than he had been as a lad at college, and was by no means gifted with the knack of making pretty conversation for the world at large. Of late whenever they had met, Harcourt had said something which grated painfully on the other's inner sensibilities, and hence had arisen this dislike.

But the dislike seemed to be all on one side. Harcourt now was a man whose name was frequent in other men's mouths. Great changes were impending in the political world, and Harcourt was one of the men whom the world regarded as sure to be found swimming on the top of the troubled waters. The people of the Battersea Hamlets were proud of him, the House of Commons listened to him, suitors employed him, and men potent in the Treasury chambers, and men also who hoped to be potent there, courted and flattered him.

All this made him busy; but, nevertheless, he found time to come to his dear friend.

'I am sorry for this; very sorry,' he said, as he put out his hand in a manner that seemed to his friend to be almost patronizing. 'Can nothing be done?'

‘Nothing at all,’ said Bertram, rather curtly.

‘Can I do nothing?’ said the cunning, legal man.

‘Nothing at all,’ said Bertram, very curtly.

‘Ah, I wish I could. I should be so happy to rearrange matters if it be at all possible.’ There are some men who are so specially good at rearranging the domestic disarrangements of others.

‘It is an affair,’ said Bertram, ‘which admits of no interference. Perhaps it is unnecessary that I should have troubled you on the matter at all, for I know that you are very busy; but—’

‘My dear fellow—busy, indeed! What business could be more important to me than my friend’s happiness?’

‘But,’ continued George, ‘as the affair had been talked over so often between you and me, I thought it right to tell you.’

‘Of course—of course; and so nothing can be done. Ah, well! it is very sad, very. But I suppose you know best. She is a charming girl. Perhaps, rather—’

‘Harcourt, I had rather not hear a word spoken about her in any way; but certainly not a word in her dispraise.’

‘Dispraise! no, certainly not. It would be much easier to praise her. I always admired her very much; very much indeed.’

‘ Well, there’s an end of it.’

‘ So be it. But I am sorry, very sorry; heartily sorry. You are a little rough now, Bertram. Of course I see that you are so. Every touch goes against the hair with you; every little blow hits you on the raw. I can understand that; and therefore I do not mind your roughness. But we are old friends, you know. Each is perhaps the other’s oldest friend; and I don’t mean to lose such a friend because you have a shade of the misanthrope on you just now. You’ll throw the bile off in another essay, rather more bitter than the last, and then you’ll be all right.’

‘ I’m right enough now, thank you. Only a man can’t always be in high spirits. At least, some men cannot.’

‘ Well, God bless you, old fellow! I know you want me gone; so I’ll go now. But never talk to me about my business. I do get through a good deal of business, but it shall never stand between you and me.’

And so the cunning legal man went his way.

And then there remained the journey to Hadley. After that it was his purpose to go abroad again, to go to Paris, and live in dingy lodgings there *au cinquième*, to read French free-thinking books, to study the wild side of politics, to learn if he

could, among French theatres and French morals, French freedom of action, and freedom of speech, and freedom of thought—France was a blessed country for freedom in those days, under the paternal monarchy of that paternal monarch, Louis Philippe—to learn to forget, among these sources of inspiration, all that he had known of the sweets of English life.

But there remained the journey to Hadley. It had always been his custom to go to Mr. Pritchett in the city before he went to his uncle's house, and he did so now. Everybody who wished to see Mr. Bertram always went to Mr. Pritchett first, and Mr. Pritchett would usually send some *avant-courier* to warn his patron of the invasion.

'Ah, Mr. George,' said Pritchett, wheezing, with his most melancholy sigh. 'You shouldn't have left the old gentleman so long, sir. Indeed you shouldn't.'

'But he does not want to see me,' said George.

'Think what a sight of money that is!' continued Pritchett. 'One would really think, Mr. George, that you objected to money. There is that gentleman, your particular friend, you know, the member of Parliament. He is down there constantly, paying his respects, as he calls it.'

'What, Mr. Harcourt?'

'Yes, Mr. Harcourt. And he sends grapes in

spring, and turkeys in summer, and green peas in winter.'

'Green peas in winter! they must cost something.'

'Of course they do; sprats to catch big fish with, Mr. George. And then the old gentleman has got a new lawyer; some sharp new light of Mr. Harcourt's recommending. Oh, Mr. George, Mr. George! do be careful, do now! Could not you go and buy a few ducks, or pigeons, and take them in a basket? The old gentleman does seem to like that kind of thing, though ten years since he was so different. Half a million of money, Mr. George! It's worth a few grapes and turkeys.' And Mr. Pritchett shook his head and wrung his hands; for he saw that nothing he said produced any effect.

George went to Hadley at last without ducks or pigeons, grapes or turkeys. He was very much amused however with the perpetual industry of his friend. '*Labor omnia vincit improbus*,' said he to himself. 'It is possible that Harcourt will find my uncle's blind side at last.'

He found the old gentleman considerably changed. There were, occasionally, flashes of his former customary, sarcastic pungency; now and again he would rouse himself to be ill-natured, antagonistic, and self-willed. But old

age and illness had sadly told upon him ; and he was content for the most part to express his humour by little shrugs, shakes of the head, and an irritable manner he had lately acquired of rubbing his hands quickly together.

‘ Well, George,’ he said, when his nephew shook hands with him and asked after his health.

‘ I hope you are better than you were, sir. I was sorry to hear that you had been again suffering.’

‘ Suffer, yes ; a man looks to suffer when he gets to my age. He’s a fool if he doesn’t, at least. Don’t trouble yourself to be sorry about it, George.’

‘ I believe you saw my father not long since ?’ Bertram said this, not quite knowing how to set the conversation going, so that he might bring in the tidings he had come there to communicate.

‘ Yes, I did,’ said Mr. Bertram senior ; and his hands went to work as he sat in the arm-chair.

‘ Did you find him much altered since you last met ? It was a great many years since, I believe ?’

‘ Not in the least altered. Your father will never alter.’

George now knew enough of his father’s character to understand the point of this ; so he

changed the subject, and did that which a man who has anything to tell should always do at once ; he commenced the telling of it forthwith.

‘ I have come down here, to-day, sir, because I think it right to let you know at once that Miss Waddington and I have agreed that our engagement shall be at an end.’

Mr. Bertram turned sharp round in his chair. ‘ What ?’ said he. ‘ What ?’

‘ Our engagement is at an end. We are both aware that it is better for us it should be so.’

‘ What do you mean ? Better for you ! How can it be better for you ? You are two fools.’

‘ Very likely, sir. We have been two fools ; or, at any rate, I have been one.’

Mr. Bertram sat still in his chair, silent for a few moments. He still kept rubbing his hands, but in meditation rather than in anger. Though his back reached to the back of his chair, his head was brought forward and leaned almost on his chest. His cheeks had fallen in since George had seen him, and his jaw hung low, and gave a sad, thoughtful look to his face, in which also there was an expression of considerable pain. His nephew saw that what he had said had grieved him, and was sorry for it.

‘ George,’ he said, in a softer voice than had ever been usual with him. ‘ I wish you to marry

Caroline. Go back to her, and make it up. Tell her that I wish it, if it be necessary to tell her anything.'

'Ah, sir, I cannot do that. I should not have come to you now if there had been any room for doubt.'

'There must be no room for doubt. This is nonsense; sheer nonsense. I shall send to Mary.' George had never before heard him call Miss Baker by her Christian name.

'It cannot be helped, sir. Miss Baker can do nothing in the matter now; nor can any one else. We both know that the marriage would not suit us.'

'Not suit you! nonsense. Two babies; two fools! I tell you it will suit you; it will suit me!'

Now had George Bertram junior not been an absolute ass, or a mole rather with no eyesight whatever for things above ground, he would have seen from this that he might not only have got back his love, but have made sure of being his uncle's heir into the bargain. At any rate, there was sufficient in what he said to insure him a very respectable share of those money-bags. How would Pritchett have rejoiced had he heard the old man speak so! and then how would he have sighed and wheezed when he saw the young man's indifference!

But George would not take the hint. He must have been blind and dull, and dead and senseless. Who before had ever heard Mr. Bertram senior speak out in that way? ‘It will suit *me*!’ And that from an old bachelor, with uncountable money-bags, to his only nephew! and such a request, too, as it conveyed—that he would again make himself agreeable to a beautiful girl whom he thoroughly loved, and by whom also he was thoroughly loved! But George was an ass, as we have said; and a mole, a blind mole; and a mule, a stiff-necked, stubborn mule. He would not yield an inch to his uncle; nor an inch to his own feelings.

‘I am sorry to vex you, sir,’ he said, coldly, ‘but it is impossible.’

‘Oh, very well,’ said the uncle, as he compressed his lips, and moved his hands. ‘Very well.’ And so they parted.

George went back to town and commenced his preparations for Paris. But on the following day he received the unwonted honour of a visit from Mr. Pritchett, and the honour was very pointed; in this wise. Mr. Pritchett, not finding him at home, had gone to a neighbouring tavern ‘to get a bit of dinner,’ as he told the woman at the chambers; and stated, that he should go on calling till he did find Mr. George. And in this way,

on his third or fourth visit, Mr. George was found.

Mr. Pritchett was dressed in his best, and was very sad and solemn. 'Mr. George,' said he, 'your uncle wishes to see you at Hadley, particular.'

'Why, I was there yesterday.'

'I know you was, Mr. George; and that's just it. Your uncle, Mr. George, is an old man, and it will be only dutiful you should be with him a good deal now. You'd wish to be a comfort to your uncle in his last days. I know that, Mr. George. He's been good to you; and you've your duty to do by him now, Mr. George; and you'll do it.' So said Mr. Pritchett, having thoroughly argued the matter in his own mind, and resolved, that as Mr. George was a wilful young horse, who would not be driven in one kind of bridle, another must be tried with him.

'But has my uncle sent to say that he wants to see me again at once?'

'He has, Mr. George; sent to say that he wants to see you again at once, particular.'

There was nothing of course for Mr. George to do but to obey, seeing that the order was so particular. On that same evening, therefore, he put his dressing-things into a bag, and again went down to Hadley.

On his first arrival his uncle shook hands with him with much more than ordinary kindness, and even joked with him.

‘ So Pritchett came to you, did he ? and sent you down at a moment’s notice ? ha ! ha ! He’s a solemn old prig, is Pritchett ; but a good servant ; a very good servant. When I am gone, he’ll have enough to live on ; but he’ll want some one to say a word to him now and again. Don’t forget what I say about him. It’s not so easy to find a good servant.’

George declared that he always had had, and would have, a regard for Mr. Pritchett ; ‘ though I wish he were not quite so sad.’

‘ Poor Pritchett ! well ; yes, he is sad,’ said the uncle, laughing ; and then George went upstairs to get ready for dinner.

The dinner, considering the house in which it was spread, was quite *recherché*. George said to himself that the fat fowls which he saw must have come from Harcourt’s larder. Roast mutton and boiled beef—not together, but one on one day and the other on the next—generally constituted the fare at Mr. Bertram’s house when he did not sit down to dinner alone. But now there was quite a little banquet. During dinner, he made sundry efforts to be agreeable ; pressed his nephew to eat, and drank wine with him in the old-

fashioned affectionate manner of past days. 'Your health, George,' he said. 'You'll find that sherry good, I think. It ought to be, if years can make it so.'

It was good; and George was very sorry to find that the good wine had been brought out for him. He felt that something would be required in return, and that he could not give that something.

After dinner that something was soon asked for. 'George,' said the old man, 'I have been thinking much since you went away the other day about you and Caroline. I have taken it into my stupid old head to wish that you two should be married.'

'Ah, sir!'

'Now listen to me. I do wish it, and what you have said has disturbed me. Now I do believe this of you, that you are an honest lad; and though you are so fond of your own way, I don't think you'd wish to grieve me if you could help it.'

'Not if I could help it, sir; not if I could help it, certainly.'

'You can help it. Now listen to me. An old man has no right to have his fancies unless he chooses to pay for them. I know that well enough. I don't want to ask you why you have

quarrelled with Caroline. It's about money, very likely ?'

'No, sir, no ; not in the least.'

'Well, I don't want to inquire. A small limited income is very likely to lead to misunderstandings. You have at any rate been honest and true to me. You are not a bit like your father.'

'Sir! sir!'

'And, and—I'll tell you what I'll do. Caroline is to have six thousand pounds, isn't she ?'

'Pray believe me, sir, that money has nothing whatever to do with this matter.'

'Yes, six,' continued Mr. Bertram ; 'four of her own, and two from me. Now I'll tell you what I'll do. Let me see. You have two hundred a year ; that's settled on you. And you had a thousand pounds the other day. Is that all gone yet ?'

'I am in no want of money, uncle ; none whatever.'

'No, not as a bachelor ; but as a married man you would be. Now do tell me—how much of that thousand pounds did the colonel get out of you ?'

'Dear uncle, do remember that he is my father.'

'Well, well ; two hundred a year, and two

thousand pounds, and one, and Pritchett's account. I'll tell you what, George, I should like to see you comfortable; and if you and Caroline are married before next October, I'll give you—'

'I can't tell you how you pain me, sir.'

'I'll give you— I wonder how much income you think you'll want?'

'None, sir; none. As our marriage is out of the question, we shall want no income. As I am, and am likely to remain unmarried, my present income is sufficient for me.'

'I'll give you—let me see.' And the old miser—for though capable of generosity to a great extent, as he had certainly shown with reference to his nephew's early years, he certainly was a miser—the old miser again recapitulated to himself all that he had already done, and tried to calculate at what smallest figure, at what lowest amount of ready money to be paid down, he could purchase the object which he now desired. 'I'll give you four thousand pounds on the day you are married. There, that will be ten thousand beside your own income, and whatever your profession will bring you.'

'What am I to say, sir? I know how generous you are; but this is not an affair of money.'

'What is it then?'

'We should not be happy together.'

‘Not happy together! You shall be happy, I tell you; you will be happy if you have enough to live on. Remember, I may leave you something more than that when I die; that is, I may do so if you please me. You will understand, however, that I make no promise.’

‘Dear uncle,’ said George, and as he spoke he rose from his seat, and crossing over to his uncle, took the old man’s hand in his own. ‘You shall be asked for no promise; you shall be asked for nothing. You have been most liberal, most kind to me; too kind, I know, for I have not returned it by that attention which you deserved from me. But, believe me, I cannot do as you ask me. If you will speak to Miss Waddington, she will tell you the same.’

‘Miss Waddington! Pshaw!’

‘Caroline, I mean. It is impossible, sir. And it adds greatly to my own suffering—for I have suffered in all this—that you also should be grieved.’

‘Why, you were so much in love with her the other day! Mary told me that you were dying for her.’

‘I cannot explain it all. But she—Caroline—doubtless will. However, pray, pray take this for granted: the engagement between us cannot be renewed.’

Old Mr. Bertram still kept his nephew's hand, and it seemed as though he liked to hold it. He continued to look up into George's face as though striving to read there something different from the words which he heard, something which might yet give him some consolation. He had said that George was honest, and he believed it, as far as he could believe in honesty. But, nevertheless, he was still meditating at what price he could buy over his nephew to his purpose. After such a struggle as that of his whole lifetime, could he have any other faith but that money were omnipotent? No; this of course, this necessarily was his belief. As to the sufficient quantity—on that point it was possible for him to doubt. His nephew's manner to him was very touching; the tone of his voice, the look of his countenance, the grief which sat on his brow, did touch him. But they touched him in this manner; they made him feel that a few thousands were not sufficient. He had at last a desire at his heart, a family domestic warm desire; and he began to feel that if he were not prepared to give up his desire, he must bid high for its fulfilment.

'George,' said he, 'after all, you and Caroline are the nearest relatives I have; the nearest and the dearest.'

‘Caroline is your own child’s child, sir.’


‘She is but a girl; and it would all go to some spendthrift, whose very name would be different. And, I don’t know, but I think I like you better than her. Look here now. According to my present will, nine-tenths of my property will go to build a hospital that shall bear my name. You’ll not repeat that to anybody, will you?’

‘No, sir; I will not.’

‘If you’ll do as I would have you about this marriage, I’ll make a new will, and you and your children shall have—I’ll let you say yourself how much you shall have; there—and you shall see the will yourself before the wedding takes place.’

‘What can I say to him? what can I say to him?’ said George, turning away his face. ‘Sir, it is quite impossible. Is not that enough? Money has nothing to do with it; can have nothing to do with it.’

‘You don’t think I’d deceive you, do you, and make another will afterwards? It shall be a deed of gift if you like, or a settlement—to take effect of course after my death.’ On hearing this George turned away his face. ‘You shall have half, George; there, by G—you shall have half; settled on you—there—half of it, settled on you.’



And then only did the uncle drop his nephew's hand. He dropped it, and closing his eyes, began to meditate on the tremendous sacrifice he had made.

There was something terrible in this to young Bertram. He had almost ceased to think of himself in watching his uncle's struggles. It was dreadful to see how terribly anxious the old man was, and more dreadful still to witness the nature of the thoughts which were running through his mind. He was making lavish tenders of his heaven, his god, his blessings; he was offering to part with his paradise, seeing that nature would soon imperatively demand that he should part with it. But useless as it must soon be to him, he could not bring himself to believe that it was not still all-powerful with others.

'Mr. Bertram, it is clearly necessary that we should understand each other,' said George, with a voice that he intended should be firm, but which in truth was stern as well as firm. 'I thought it right to come and tell you that this match was broken off. But seeing that that has once been told, there is no longer room for further conversation on the matter. We have made up our minds to part; and, having done so, I can assure you that money can have no effect upon our resolution.'

‘Then you want it all—all!’ said the uncle, almost weeping.

‘Not all, nor ten times all would move me one inch—not one inch,’ said George, in a voice that was now loud, and almost angry.

Mr. Bertram turned towards the table, and buried his face in his hands. He did not understand it. He did not know whence came all this opposition. He could not conceive what was the motive power which caused his nephew thus to thwart and throw him over, standing forward as he did with thousands and tens of thousands in his hand. But he knew that his request was refused, and he felt himself degraded and powerless.

‘Do not be angry with me, uncle,’ said the nephew.

‘Go your own way, sir; go your own way,’ said the uncle. ‘I have done with you. I had thought—but never mind—’ and he rang the bell violently. ‘Sarah, I will go to bed—are my things ready? Woman, is my room ready, I say?’ and then he had himself led off, and George saw him no more that night.


Nor did he see him the next morning; nor for many a long day afterwards. When the morning came, he sent in his love, with a hope that his uncle was better. Sarah, coming out with a long

face, told George that his uncle had only muttered between his teeth—‘That it was nothing to him’—to his nephew, namely—‘whether he were better or worse.’ And so, having received this last message, he went his way, and returned to town.

CHAPTER X.

DOES HE KNOW IT YET ?

ALMOST immediately after this George Bertram did go to Paris; but before he went he received a letter from Arthur Wilkinson, begging him to go down to Hurst Staple. This was Arthur's answer to the letter in which Bertram had communicated the last news from Littlebath. There were not as many words in the letter as there had been in that from Adela to Caroline; but they were much to the same effect. 'This is an important step, old fellow; very: pray—pray be careful; for your own sake and hers.' I am not good at letter-writing, as you know; but come down here and talk it over. I have other things of my own I want to talk about. The spare bedroom is empty.' That was nearly the whole of it. In answer to this, Bertram had declared his intention of going to Paris, but had promised to go down to Hurst Staple as soon as he returned home.



At this time the popularity of Louis Philippe was on the wane. The grocers of Paris were becoming sick of their paternal citizen king, who, in spite of his quiet family costume and citizen umbrella, seemed to think as much as some other kings of crowds of soldiers, of fortifications, and war taxes; who seemed to think also that free-spoken deputies might be judiciously controlled, that a paternally-royal family might be judiciously enriched, and that a good many of the old crown tenets and maxims might again be judiciously brought to bear upon the commonwealth. Poor grocers! too much prosperity had made them over-nice. When Mr. Smith had been about six months gone from them, how gladly would they have had him back again!

But they are again satisfied. The grocer interest, which on the whole may perhaps be looked on as predominant in Paris, is once more swathed in rose-leaves. The swathings certainly are somewhat tight; and rose-leaves may be twisted till there is no breaking them. But there will still remain the fragrance, the *pot-pourri* odour which is so delectable to ancient housewives, the oily savour of plenteousness. If a king can so devise that chocolate shall be sold—and paid for—what more can a grocer interest need? What more than this, that having sold

its daily quantum of chocolate, it shall have a theatre to go to, a spectacle to look at, ices, coffee, and *eau sucrée*! Since the world began to open its young eyes and look about it with any understanding, what else has been desirable? What does a man and a grocer want? *Panem et circenses*; soup that shall not be too *maigre*; and a seat at the Porte St. Martin that shall not be too dear. Is it not all written in that?

England a nation of shopkeepers! No, let us hope not; not as yet, at any rate. There have been nations to whom the buying and selling of bread and honey—especially of honey—has been everything; lost nations—people deadened, whose souls were ever sleeping, whose mouths only and gastric organs attested that life was in them. There were such people in the latter days of ancient Rome; there were such also in that of Eastern Rome upon the Bosphorus; rich and thriving people, with large mouths and copious bellies, wanting merely the salt of life. But let us hope that no English people will be such as long as the roads are open to Australia, to Canada, and New Zealand.

A young man whose life was to be spent in writing politico-religious pamphlets had much to learn in Paris in those days. Indeed, Paris has ever been a school for such writers since men began

to find that something was wrong, even under the reign of the great Dubarry. Since those days it has been the laboratory of the political alchemist, in which everything hitherto held precious has been reduced to a residuum, in order that from the ashes might be created that great arcanum, a fitting constitution under which thinking men may live contented. The secret had been hardly solved in those latter days of poor Louis Philippe. Much had certainly been done when a citizen king was thought of and set agoing; but even a citizen king required to be wound up, and the alchemist was still at his crucibles.

Now, indeed, the work has been finished. The laboratory is closed. The philosopher, his task all done, has retired to his needed rest. Thinking men, even thinking Frenchmen, can live contented. Chocolate is sold—and paid for. And a score and a half of daily theatres are open at the most moderate of prices.

Intent on such things, and on his coming volume, our young broken-hearted philosopher stayed out three months at Paris. We need not follow him very closely in his doings there. His name was already sufficiently known to secure his admittance amongst those learned men who, if they had hitherto established little, had at any-rate achieved the doubting of much. While he

was here the British Ministry went out of office. Sir Robert, having repealed the corn laws, fell to the ground between two stools, and the number of the 'Daily Jupiter' which gave the first authentic list of the members of the new government, contained, among the few new names that were mentioned, that of Sir Henry Harcourt as Her Majesty's solicitor-general.


At the end of the three months Bertram returned to England, enriched by many new ideas as to the government of mankind in general. His volume was not yet finished. So he packed up his papers in his portmanteau and took them down with him to Hurst Staple. He saw no one as he passed through London. The season was then over, and his friend Sir Henry was refreshing himself with ten days' grouse-shooting after the successful campaign of the last session. But had he been in London, Bertram would not have seen him, for he saw no one. He asked no questions about Caroline, nor any about his uncle. He did not even call on his sincere friend Pritchett. Had he done so, he would have learned that Miss Baker and her niece were both staying at Hadley. He might also have learned other news, which, however, was not long in following him.

He went down to Hurst Staple, merely writing a line the day before he started, to prepare his

friend for his advent. But when he reached the vicarage, Arthur Wilkinson was not there. He was at Oxford ; but had left word that he was to be summoned home as soon as Bertram arrived. The ladies, however, expected him, and there would have been nothing for him to remark in the state of the quiet household had there not been another visitor in the house. Adela Gauntlet was staying there, and she was dressed in the deepest mourning.

The story was soon told to him. Mr. Gauntlet had one morning been found dead in his dressing-room. The good old man had been full of years, and there was nothing frightful in his death but its suddenness. But sudden death is always frightful. Overnight he had been talking to his daughter with his usual quiet, very quiet, mirth ; and in the morning she was woke with the news that his spirit had fled. His mirth for this world was over. His worldly duties were done. He had received his daughter's last kiss, had closed for the last time the book which had been his life's guide, had whispered to heaven his last prayer, and his soul was now at rest.

There was nothing in this that the world need regard as mournful. There was no pain, no mental pangs, no dire remorse. But for Adela the suddenness had been very dreadful.



Among her other miseries had been the great misery of having to seek a home. An Englishman's house is his castle. And a rector's parsonage is as much the rector's castle, his own freehold castle, as is the earl's family mansion that of the earl. But it is so with this drawback, that the moment the rector's breath is out of his body, all right and claim to the castle as regards his estate and family cease instantly. If the widow and children remain there one night, they remain there on sufferance.

Adela's future home would now necessarily be with her aunt, Miss Penelope Gauntlet; but it happened most unfortunately that at the moment of her brother's death, Miss Gauntlet was absent with other relatives in Italy. Nor was her address accurately known. Her party had been at Rome; but it was supposed that they had left the holy city before the end of May: and now, at the end of August, when her presence in England was so necessary, Adela had no more than a faint belief that her aunt was at the baths of Lucca. In the meantime it was absolutely necessary that she should somewhere find a resting-place for herself.

Both Caroline Waddington and Miss Baker wrote to her at once. Unfortunately they were at Hadley; but if Adela would come to them, they would return to Littlebath. They, or at

any rate, one of them would do so. There was much that was really generous in this offer, as will be seen when we come in the next page or two to narrate what had lately occurred at Hadley. But Adela already knew what had occurred; and much as she then longed for a home, she knew that she could not allow either of them to go to Littlebath.

Immediately that Mr. Gauntlet's death was known at Hurst Staple—and it was known there two hours after Adela knew it herself—Mrs. Wilkinson went over to bring her to the vicarage. The reader will know that there were reasons why Adela should be most unwilling to choose that house as her temporary residence. She was most unwilling; and for a day or two, much to Mrs. Wilkinson's surprise, she refused to leave West Putford. But it was necessary that she should leave it. She could not remain alone in the house on the day that her father's body was carried to his grave; and so at last she submitted, and allowed herself to be taken over to Hurst Staple.

'It is provoking, dear,' said Mrs. Wilkinson to her, 'and I am sure you will think it very uncivil, but Arthur went off to Oxford yesterday. And it was uncivil. I am sure he needs not have gone at this very moment.'

Then Adela felt very grateful to her neighbour,

and acknowledged in her heart that he had been kind to her.

‘But he must be back on Saturday,’ continued the widow, ‘for he could get no clergyman to take his duty. Indeed, he has to take the evening service at West Putford as well.’

On the day following this, George Bertram arrived at the vicarage.

His first evening in the house was not very bright. Mrs. Wilkinson had never been a bright woman. She had certain motherly good qualities, which had been exerted in George’s favour in his earliest years; and on this account she was still able to speak to him in a motherly way. She could talk to him about his breakfasts and dinners, and ask after his buttons and linen, and allude to his bachelor habits. And in such conversation the first evening was chiefly passed. Adela said almost nothing. The Wilkinson girls, who were generally cheerful themselves, were depressed by Adela’s sorrow—and depressed also somewhat by what they knew of Bertram’s affairs. On this matter Mrs. Wilkinson was burning to speak; but she had made up her mind to leave it in silence for one evening. She confined herself, therefore, to the button question, and to certain allusions to her own griefs. It appeared that she was not quite so happy with reference to

Arthur as one would have wished her to be. She did not absolutely speak against him; but she said little snubbing things of him, and seemed to think him by no means sufficiently grateful for all the care she took of him.

That night, in the privacy of Adela's own room, something was said about George Bertram. 'I am sure he does not know it yet,' said Sophia.

'Caroline told me she would write to him,' said Adela: 'she would be very wrong not to do so—very wrong.'

'You may be sure he has not heard it,' repeated the other. 'Did you not observe the way he spoke of Mr. Harcourt?'

'Sir Henry Harcourt,' said Mary.

'I did not hear it,' said Adela.

'Oh, he did speak of him. He said something about his great good fortune. He never would have spoken in that way had he known it.'

'Do you know,' said Mary, 'I do not think he would have him come down here had he heard it—not yet, at least.'


The next morning two letters were laid before George Bertram as they were sitting at breakfast. Then he did know it; then he did learn it, and not till then. It was now the end of August, and in the coming month of November—about the end of November—Sir Henry Har-

court, Her Majesty's solicitor-general, and member for the Battersea Hamlets, was to lead to the hymeneal altar Miss Caroline Waddington, the granddaughter and presumed heiress of the great millionaire, Mr. Bertram. Who so high now on the ladder of fortune as the fortunate Sir Henry Harcourt? In love and politics and the realms of Plutus, he carried all before him. Yes, Sir Henry Harcourt was the coming man. Quidnuncs at the clubs began to say that he would give up the legal side of politics and devote himself to statesmanship. He would be the very man for a home secretary. Old Bertram, they observed, was known to be dying. Old Bertram, they also observed, had made a distinct promise to Sir Henry and his granddaughter. The marriage was to take place at Hadley, from the old man's house; the old man was delighted with the match, &c., &c., &c.; who so happy, who so great, who so fortunate as Sir Henry Harcourt?

That habit of bringing in letters at the breakfast-table has its good points, certainly. It is well that one should have one's letters before the work or pleasure of the day commences: it is well to be able to discuss the different little subjects of mutual interest as they are mentioned. 'Eliza's baby has got her first tooth: it's all

right. There's nothing like Daffy's Elixir after all.' 'My dear, the guano will be here to-day; so the horses will be wanted all the week—remember that.' 'What a bore, papa; for here's a letter to say that Kate Carnabie's coming; and we must go over to the Poldoodles. Frank Poldoodle is quite smitten with Kate.' This is all very convenient; but the plan has its drawbacks. Some letters will be in their nature black and brow-compelling. Tidings will come from time to time at which men cannot smile. There will be news that ruffles the sweetest temper, and at receipt of which clouds will darken the most kindly face. One would fain receive such letters in private.

Two such letters Bertram received that morning, and read while the eyes of the parsonage breakfast-table were—not fixed on him, but which under such circumstances is much worse—were purposely turned away. He knew well the handwriting of each, and would fain have escaped with them from the room. But this he felt to be cowardly; and so he read them both, sitting there in the family circle. They were from Caroline and Sir Henry. We will give precedence to the lady; but Bertram did not so read them. The lady's letter was the most trying to his nerves, and was therefore taken the last. It



can hardly be said that their contents surprised him. When they both came into his hands together, he seemed to feel by intuition what was the news which they contained. That from Caroline was very fairly written. But how many times had it been rewritten before that fair copy was prepared?

‘ Hadley, August, 184—.

‘ My dear Mr. Bertram,

‘ I do not know whether I am right in thinking that I ought myself to tell you of the step which I am going to take. If it is unnecessary, I know you will forgive me, and will be certain that I have intended to do what is right. Sir Henry Harcourt has proposed to me, and I have accepted him. I believe we shall be married some time before Christmas.

‘ We are staying here with grandpapa. I think he approves of what I am doing; but you know that he is not very communicative. At any rate, I shall be married from this house, and I think that he likes Sir Henry. Aunt Mary is reconciled to all this now.

‘ I do not know that I need say any more, excepting that I shall always—always hope for your welfare; and be so happy if I can hear of your happiness. I pray you also to forgive me what injuries I may have done you.

‘It may be that at some future time we shall meet as friends in London. I hope we may. It is a comfort to me that Sir Henry Harcourt knows exactly all that there has been between us.

‘Believe me to be,

‘Yours most sincerely,

‘CAROLINE WADDINGTON.’

Harcourt’s letter was written in faster style, and a more running hand. Solicitors-general have hardly time to stop and pick their words. But though the manner of it was free and easy, it seemed to Bertram that the freedom and easiness were but affected.

‘My dear Bertram,

‘I hope and trust that the news I have to tell you will be no interruption to our friendship. I am sure that it should not be, seeing that I am doing you no injury. Caroline Waddington and I have agreed to put our fortunes into the same boat. We shall feel much more comfortable on the seas if you will be gracious enough to say, “God save the bark.”

‘Caroline has of course told me all that has occurred; as, indeed, you had done previously. As far as I am concerned, I must say she has

behaved gloriously. I always admired her greatly, as you know; though of course till lately I never thought it possible I should possess what I so much admired.

‘Speaking plainly, I think that she will be happier with me than she would have been with you; and that I shall be happier with her than you would have been. We are better adapted to each other. There is a dash of worldliness about us both from which your more ethereal composition is happily free.

‘God bless you, old fellow. Pray write a line in answer, saying as much to me. Of course, you will let us see you in London. Caroline wishes it particularly; and so do I.

‘I believe I shall be turned off in December. Such a mill-horse as I am cannot choose my time. I am going to Scotland for ten days, and shall then be hard at work till our marriage. I must of course be back when the session commences. We talk of going to Nice, and thence to Genoa.

‘The old gentleman is very civil; but there has been no word of money, nor will there be a word. However, thank God, I don’t want it.

‘Always your sincerest friend,

‘HENRY HARCOURT.

‘Reform Club—August, 184—.’

These letters did not take long in the reading. Within five minutes Bertram was spreading the butter on his toast; and within two minutes more he was asking what news there was from Arthur—when would he be home? He had received a great blow, a stunning blow; but he was able to postpone the faintness which would follow it till he should be where no eye could see him.

The breakfast passed away very silently. They all knew what those two letters contained. One of the girls had had them in her hand, and had known the handwriting of one and guessed that of the other. But even without this they would have known. Are not most of our innermost secrets known to all the world?

And then Bertram skulked off—or endeavoured rather to do so; for Mrs. Wilkinson detected him in the act, and stopped him. She had said nothing hitherto about his matrimonial or non-matrimonial affairs. She had abstained with wonderful discretion; and she now intended that her discretion should be rewarded.

‘George, George,’ she said, as he turned from the breakfast-parlour door to the rack in the hall on which his hat was hanging, ‘I want you just for a minute.’ So George returned into the parlour as the girls passed across the hall into the drawing-room.

‘I’m afraid you’ll think me unkind because I’ve said nothing about this sad affair of yours.’

‘Not at all, aunt,’ he said : though she was no aunt of his, he had always called her so when he had been at Hurst Staple as a child. ‘There are some things which had, perhaps, better not be talked about.’ Mrs. Wilkinson, however, was not the woman to be deterred by such a faint repulse as this.

‘Exactly so; except among intimate family friends. But I was very sorry to hear about your breaking off the affair with Caroline Waddington. I was, indeed; very. It would have been so suitable as regards the old gentleman—I know all about that you know—’ and the lady nodded her head, as ladies will do sometimes when they flatter themselves that they know more about such things than their neighbours.

‘It was necessary,’ said Bertram.

‘Necessary—ah, yes: I dare say. I don’t in the least mean to blame you, George. I am sure you would not behave badly to any girl—and, from what I have heard, I am quite sure—quite sure it was not your fault. Indeed, I know very well—’ and in lieu of finishing her speech, Mrs. Wilkinson again nodded her head.

‘Nobody was to blame, aunt; nobody, and it is much better to say nothing about it.’

‘That is very good of you, George; very. But I always shall say—’

‘Dear aunt, pray say nothing. We had thought when we knew little of each other that it would suit us to live together. As we learnt each other’s characters more thoroughly, we found that we had been wrong. It was better for us, therefore, to part; and we did part.’

‘And so now she is going to be Lady Harcourt?’

‘Yes; it seems so.’

‘Well, at any rate, we must all say this: she hasn’t lost any time. I don’t know what Sir Henry may think of it; but it certainly does seem to me—’

‘Dear aunt, pray do not talk to me about this. I think Miss Waddington quite right to accept Sir Henry Harcourt. That is, I think her right under the circumstances. He is a rising man, and she will grace any station in which he can place her. I do not at all blame her, not in the least; it would be monstrous if I did.’

‘Oh, of course—we all know that it was you broke off the other match; all the world knows that. But what I want to speak about is this. The old gentleman’s money, George! Now Sir Henry of course is looking to that.’

‘He has my permission.’

‘And of course he will get some of it. That’s to be expected—she’s his grandchild—of course I know that,’ and Mrs. Wilkinson again nodded her head. ‘But, George, you must look very close after the old gentleman. It won’t at all do to let Harcourt cut you out altogether. I do hope you mean to be a good deal down at Hadley. It won’t last for long, you know.’

Bertram would not condescend to explain to Mrs. Wilkinson that he had no intention of going near his uncle again, and that he was sick of the very name of the old man’s money. So he hummed and hawed, and changed the conversation by saying that he should be so glad to see Arthur on his return.

‘Yes, I am sure you will. But you’ll find Arthur much changed—very much.’ And it was clear from the tone of Mrs. Wilkinson’s voice that she did not think that this change in her son was for the better.

‘He is growing older, I suppose; like the rest of us,’ said Bertram, attempting to laugh.

‘Oh, yes; he’s growing older, of course. But people should grow better, George, and more contented; particularly when they have everything about them that they can possibly want.’

‘Is not Arthur contented? He should get married then. Look at Adela Gauntlet there!’

‘Nonsense, George; pray don’t put that into his head. What has he to marry on? And as for Adela, if she has fifteen hundred pounds it will be every farthing. And what’s that for a family?’

‘But Arthur has a living.’

‘Now, George, don’t you be talking in that way to him. In one sense he has a living; for, situated as things at present are, of course I cannot hold it in my own hands. But in real truth he has not a living—not of his own. Lord Stapledean, whom I shall always regard as the very first nobleman in the land, and a credit to the very peerage, expressly gave the living to me.’

‘To you, aunt?’

‘Yes, expressly to me. And now I fear Arthur is discontented because he knows that I choose to remain mistress of my own house. I have done everything I can to make the house pleasant to him. He has the same study his dear father always had; and he has his own separate horse in the stable, which is more than his father had.’

‘But Arthur has his fellowship.’

‘And where would his fellowship be if he married Adela Gauntlet? I do hope you’ll say something to him to make him more contented. I say nothing about his conduct to me. I don’t suppose he means to be undutiful.’

And then Bertram did manage to escape; and taking his hat he walked away along that same river-path which led to West Putford—that same path which Arthur Wilkinson had used to take when he went fishing in those happy early days before promotion had come to him, and the glories of manhood.

But George was not thinking now of Arthur or of Adela. He had enough of sorrow in his own breast to make his mind selfish for the present—Caroline Waddington was to be married! to be married so soon after getting quit of her former bondage; to be married to Henry Harcourt. There was no chance left now, no hope, no possibility that he might regain the rich prize which he had flung away.

And did he wish to regain it? Was it not now clear enough that she had never loved him? In May, while the fruits were filling, they had separated; and now before they were well ripe she had given herself to another! Love him! no, indeed. Was it possible that she should love any man?—that she, who could so redeem herself and so bestow herself, should have any heart, any true feeling of what love is?

And yet this was not the worst of it. Such love as she had to give, had she not given it to this Harcourt even before she had rescued herself

from her former lover ? Had she not given this man her preference, such preference as she had to give, then, then when she was discussing with him how best to delay her nuptials with her acknowledged suitor ? This successful, noisy, pushing, worldly man had won her by his success and his worldliness. The glitter of the gold had caught her ; and so she had been unhappy, and had pined, and worn herself with grief till she could break away from her honest troth, and bind herself to the horn of the golden calf.

'Twas thus that he now thought of her, thus that he spoke of her to himself out loud, now that he could wander alone, with no eye to watch him, no ear to hear him. And yet he loved her with a strong love, with a mad passion such as he had never felt before. Much as he blamed her, thoroughly as he despised her for being so venal ; yet he blamed, nay, scorned, himself more vehemently in that he had let this plausible knave with his silken words rob from him the only treasure worth his having. Why had he not toiled ? Why had he not made a name for himself ? Why had he not built a throne on which his lady-love might sit and shine before the world ?

CHAPTER XL

HURST STAPLE.

THE next three or four days passed by heavily enough, and then Arthur Wilkinson returned. He returned on a Saturday evening; as clergy men always do, so as to be ready for their great day of work. There are no Sabbath-breakers to be compared, in the vehemence of their Sabbath-breaking, to hard-worked parochial clergymen—unless, indeed, it be Sunday-school children, who are forced on that day to learn long dark collects, and stand in dread catechismal row before their spiritual pastors and masters.

In the first evening there was that flow of friendship which always exists for the few first hours of meeting between men who are really fond of each other. And these men were fond of each other; the fonder perhaps because each of them had now cause for sorrow. Very little was said between Arthur and Adela. There was not

apparently much to alarm the widow in their mutual manner, or to make her think that Miss Gauntlet was to be put in her place. Adela sat among the other girls, taking even less share in the conversation than they did; and Arthur, though he talked as became the master of the house, talked but little to her.

On the following morning they all went to church, of course. Who has courage to remain away from church when staying at the clergyman's house? No one ever; unless it be the clergyman's wife, or perhaps an independent self-willed daughter. At Hurst Staple, however, on this Sunday they all attended. Adela was in deepest mourning. Her thick black veil was down, so as to hide her tears. The last Sunday she had been at church her father had preached his last sermon.

Bertram, as he entered the door, could not but remember how long it was since he had joined in public worship. Months and months had passed over him since he had allowed himself to be told that the Scriptures moved him in sundry places to acknowledge and confess his sins. And yet there had been a time when he had earnestly poured forth his frequent prayers to heaven; a time not long removed. It was as yet hardly more than three years since he had sworn within

himself on the brow of Olivet to devote himself to the service of his Saviour. Why had that oath been broken? A girl had ridiculed it; a young girl had dissipated all that by the sheen of her beauty, by the sparkle of her eye, by the laughter of her ruddy lip. He had promised himself to his God, but the rustling of silks had betrayed his heart. At her instance, at her first word, that promise had been whistled down the wind.

And to what had this brought him now? As for the bright eyes, and the flashing beauty, and the ruddy lips, they were made over in fee-simple to another, who was ready to go further than he had gone in seeking this world's vanities. Even the price of his apostasy had vanished from him.

But was this all? was this nearly all? was this as anything to that further misery which had come upon him? Where was his faith now, his true, youthful, ardent faith; the belief of his inner heart; the conviction of a God and a Saviour, which had once been to him the source of joy? Had it all vanished when, under the walls of Jerusalem, over against that very garden of Gethsemane, he had exchanged the aspirations of his soul for the pressure of a soft white hand?

No one becomes an infidel at once. A man who has really believed does not lose by a sudden

blow the firm convictions of his soul. But when the work has been once commenced, when the first step has been taken, the pace becomes frightfully fast. Three years since his belief had been like the ardour of young love, and now what were his feelings? Men said that he was an infidel; but he would himself deny it with a frigid precision, with the stiffest accuracy of language; and then argue that his acknowledgment of a superhuman creative power was not infidelity. He had a God of his own, a cold, passionless, prudent God; the same God, he said, to whom others looked; with this only difference, that when others looked with fanatic enthusiasm, he looked with well-balanced reason. But it was the same God, he said. And as to the Saviour, he had a good deal also to say on that subject; a good deal which might show that he was not so far from others as others thought. And so he would prove that he was no infidel.

But could he thus satisfy himself now that he again heard the psalms of his youth? and remembered as he listened, that he had lost for ever that beauty which had cost him so dear? Did he not now begin to think—to feel perhaps rather than to think—that, after all, the sound of the church bells was cheering, that it was sweet to kneel there where others knelt, sweet to hear the voices

of those young children as they uttered together the responses of the service? Was he so much wiser than others that he could venture on his own judgment to set himself apart, and to throw over as useless all that was to others so precious?

Such were his feelings as he sat, and knelt, and stood there—mechanically as it were, remembering the old habits. And then he tried to pray. But praying is by no means the easiest work to which a man can set himself. Kneeling is easy; the repetition of the well-known word is easy; the putting on of some solemnity of mind is perhaps not difficult. But to remember what you are asking, why you are asking, of whom you are asking; to feel sure that you want what you do ask, and that this asking is the best way to get it;—that on the whole is not easy. On this occasion Bertram probably found it utterly beyond his capacity.

He declined to go to afternoon church. This is not held to be *de rigueur* even in a parson's house, unless it be among certain of the strictly low-church clergymen. A very high churchman may ask you to attend at four o'clock of a winter morning, but he will not be grievously offended if, on a Sunday afternoon, you prefer your arm-chair, and book—probably of sermons; but that is between you and your conscience.

They dined early, and in the evening, Bertram and his host walked out. Hitherto they had had but little opportunity of conversation, and Bertram longed to talk to some one of what was within his breast. On this occasion, however, he failed. Conversation will not always go exactly as one would have it.

‘I was glad to see you at church to-day,’ said the parson. ‘To tell you the truth, I did not expect it. I hope it was not intended as a compliment to me.’

‘I rather fear it was, Arthur.’

‘You mean that you went because you did not like to displease us by staying away?’

‘Something like it,’ said Bertram, affecting to laugh. ‘I do not want your mother and sisters, or you either, to regard me as an ogre. In England, at any rate in the country in England, one is an ogre if one doesn’t go to church. It does not much matter, I believe, what one does when one is there; so long as one is quiet, and lets the parson have his say.’

‘There is nothing so easy as ridicule, especially in matters of religion.’

‘Quite true. But then it is again true that it is very hard to laugh at anything that is not in some point ridiculous.’

‘And God’s worship is ridiculous?’

‘No; but any pretence of worshipping God is so. And as it is but a step from the ridiculous to the sublime, and as the true worship of God is probably the highest sublimity to which man can reach; so, perhaps, is he never so absolutely absurd, in such a bathos of the ridiculous, as when he pretends to do so.’

‘Every effort must sometimes fall short of success.’

‘I’ll explain what I mean,’ said Bertram, attending more to himself than his companion. ‘What idea of man can be so magnificent as that which represents him with his hands closed, and his eyes turned to that heaven with which he holds communion? But imagine the man so placed, and holding no such communion! You will at once have run down the whole gamut of humanity from St. Paul to Pecksniff.’

‘But that has nothing to do with belief. It is for the man to take care that he be, if possible, nearer to St. Paul than to Pecksniff.’

‘No, it has nothing to do with belief; but it is a gauge, the only gauge we have, of what belief a man has. How many of those who were sitting by silently while you preached really believed?’

‘All, I hope; all, I trust. I firmly trust that they are all believers; all, including yourself.’

‘I wonder whether there was one; one be-

liever in all that which you called on us to say that we believed? one, for instance, who believes in the communion of saints? one who believes in the resurrection of the body?’

‘And why should they not believe in the communion of saints? What’s the difficulty?’

‘Very little, certainly; as their belief goes—what they and you call belief. Rumtunshid gara shushabad gerostophat. That is the shibboleth of some of the Caucasian tribes. Do you believe in Rumtunshid?’

‘If you will talk gibberish when talking on such a matter, I had rather change the subject.’

‘Now you are unreasonable, and want to have all the gibberish to yourself. That you should have it all to yourself in your own pulpit we accede to you; but out here, on the heath, surely I may have my turn. You do not believe in Rumtunshid? Then why should farmer Buttercup be called on to believe in the communion of the saints? What does he believe about it? Or why should you make little Flora Buttercup tell such a huge fib as to say, that she believes in the resurrection of the body?’

‘It is taught her as a necessary lesson, and will be explained to her at the proper age.’

‘No; there is no proper age for it. It will never be explained to her. Neither Flora nor her father will ever understand anything about

it. But they will always believe it. Am I old enough to understand it? Explain it to me. No one yet has ever attempted to do so; and yet my education was not neglected.'

Wilkinson had too great a fear of his friend's powers of ridicule to venture on an explanation; so he again suggested that they should change the subject.

'That is always the way,' said Bertram. 'I never knew a clergyman who did not want to change the subject when that subject is the one on which he should be ever willing to speak.'

'If there be anything that you deem holy, you would not be willing to hear it ridiculed.'

'There is much that I deem holy, and for that I fear no laughter. I am ready to defy ridicule. But if I talk to you of the asceticism of Stylites, and tell you that I admire it, and will imitate it, will you not then laugh at me? Of course we ridicule what we think is false. But ridicule will run off truth like water from a duck's back. Come, explain to me this about the resurrection of the body.'

'Yet, in my flesh, shall I see God,' said Arthur, in a solemn tone.

'But I say, no. It is impossible.'

'Nothing is impossible with God.'

'Yes; it is impossible that his own great laws

should change. It is impossible that they should remain, and yet not remain. Your body—that which we all call our body—that which Flora Buttercup believes to be her body (for in this matter she does believe) will turn itself, through the prolific chemistry of nature, into various productive gases by which other bodies will be formed. With which body will you see Christ? with that which you now carry, or that you will carry when you die? For, of course, every atom of your body changes.’

‘It little matters which. It is sufficient for me to believe as the Scriptures teach me.’

‘Yes; if one could believe. A Jew, when he drags his dying limbs to the valley of Jehoshaphat, he can believe. He, in his darkness, knows nothing of these laws of nature. But we will go to people who are not in darkness. If I ask your mother what she means when she says—“Not by confusion of substance; but by unity of person,” what will she answer me?’

‘It is a subject which it will take her some time to explain.’

‘Yes, I think so; and me some time longer to understand.’

Wilkinson was determined not to be led into argument, and so he remained silent. Bertram was also silent for awhile, and they walked on,

each content with his own thoughts. But yet not content. Wilkinson would have been contented to be let alone; to have his mind, and faith, and hopes left in the repose which nature and education had prepared for them. But it was not so with Bertram. He was angry with himself for not believing, and angry with others that they did believe. They went on in this way for some ten minutes, and then Bertram began again.

‘Ah, that I could believe! If it were a thing to come at, as a man wishes, who would doubt? But you, you, the priest, the teacher of the people, you, who should make it all so easy, you will make it so difficult, so impossible. Belief, at any rate, should be easy, though practice may be hard.’

‘You should look to the Bible, not to us.’

‘Yes; it is there that is our stumbling-block. A book is given to us, not over well translated from various languages, part of which is history hyperbolically told—for all Eastern language is hyperbolical; part of which is prophecy, the very meaning of which is lost to us by the loss of those things which are intended to be imaged out; and part of which is thanksgiving uttered in the language of men who knew nothing, and could understand nothing of those rules by which we are to be governed.’

‘ You are talking of the Old Testament ?’

‘ It is given to us as one whole. Then we have the story of a mystery which is above, or, at least, beyond the utmost stretch of man’s comprehension ; and the very purport of which is opposed to all our ideas of justice. In the jurisprudence of heaven can that be just which here, on earth, is manifestly unjust ?’

‘ Is your faith in God so weak then, and your reliance on yourself so firm, that you can believe nothing beyond your own comprehension ?’

‘ I believe much that I do not understand. I believe the distance of the earth from the sun. I believe that the seed of a man is carried in a woman, and then brought forth to light, a living being. I do not understand the principle of this wondrous growth. But yet I believe it, and know that it is from God. But I cannot believe that evil is good. I cannot believe that man placed here by God shall receive or not receive future happiness as he may chance to agree or not to agree with certain doctors who, somewhere about the fourth century, or perhaps later, had themselves so much difficulty in coming to any agreement on the disputed subject.’

‘ I think, Bertram, that you are going into matters which you know are not vital to faith in the Christian religion.’

‘ What is vital, and what is not ? If I could

only learn that! But you always argue in a circle. I am to have faith because of the Bible; but I am to take the Bible through faith. Whence is the first spring of my faith to come? where shall I find the fountain-head?

‘ In prayer to God.’

‘ But can I pray without faith? Did any man ever kneel before a log, and ask the log that he might believe in the log? Had he no faith in the log, could it be possible that he should be seen there kneeling before it?’

‘ Has the Bible then for you no intrinsic evidence of its truth?’

‘ Yes, most irrefragable evidence; evidence that no thinking man can possibly reject. Christ’s teaching, the words that I have there as coming from his mouth are irresistible evidence of his fitness to teach. But you will permit me to use no such evidence. I must take it all, from the beginning of my career, before I can look into its intrinsic truth. And it must be all true to me: the sun standing still upon Gibeon no less than the divine wisdom which showed that Cæsar’s tribute should be paid to Cæsar.’

‘ If every man and every child is to select, how shall we ever have a creed? and if no creed, how shall we have a church?’

‘ And if no church, how then parsons? Follow

it on, and it comes to that. But, in truth, you require too much; and so you get—nothing. Your flocks do not believe, do not pray, do not listen to you. They are not in earnest. In earnest! Heavens! if a man could believe all this, could be in earnest about it, how possibly could he care for other things? But no; you pride yourselves on faith; but you have no faith. There is no such thing left. In these days men do not know what faith is.'

In the evening, when the ladies had gone to their rooms, they were again together; and Bertram thought that he would speak of Caroline. But he was again foiled. There had been some little bickering on the part of Mrs. Wilkinson. She had been querulous, and had not cared to hide it, though George and Adela were sitting there as guests. This had made her son unhappy, and he now spoke of it.

'I am sorry you should hear my mother speak in that way, George. I hope I am not harsh to her. I try to refrain from answering her. But unless I go back to my round jackets, and take my food from her hand like a child, I cannot please her.'

'Perhaps you are too careful to please her. I think you should let her know that, to a certain extent, you must be master in your own house.'

‘Ah! I have given that up long since. She has an idea that the house is hers. I do not care to thwart her in that. Perhaps I should have done it at first; but it is too late now. To-night she was angry with me because I would not read a sermon.’

‘And why then didn’t you?’

‘I have preached two to-day.’ And the young clergyman yawned somewhat wearily. ‘She used to read them herself. I did put a stop to that.’

‘Why so? why not let her read them?’

‘The girls used to go to sleep, always—and then the servants slept also. I don’t think she has a good voice for sermons. But I am sure of this, George—she has never forgiven me.’

‘And never will.’

‘Sometimes, I almost think she would wish to take my place in the pulpit.’

‘The wish is not at all unnatural, my dear fellow.’

‘The truth is, that Lord Stapledean’s message to her, and his conduct about the living, has quite upset her. I cannot blame Lord Stapledean. What he did was certainly kind. But I do blame myself. I never should have accepted the living on those terms—never, never. I knew it when I did it, and I have never since ceased to repent it.’

And so saying he got up and walked quickly about the room. 'Would you believe it now; my mother takes upon herself to tell me in what way I should read the absolution; and feels herself injured because I do not comply?'

'I can tell you but of one remedy, Arthur; but I can tell you of one.'

'What remedy?'

'Take a wife to yourself; one who will not mind in what way you read the absolution to her.'

'A wife!' said Wilkinson, and he uttered a long sigh as he continued his walk.

'Yes, a wife; why not? People say that a country clergyman should never be without a wife; and as for myself, I firmly think that they are right.'

'Every curate is to marry, then?'

'But you are not a curate.'

'I should only have the income of a curate. And where should I put a wife? The house is full of women already. Who would come to such a house as this?'

'There is Adela; would not she come if you asked her?'

'Adela!' said the young vicar. And now his walk had brought him to the further end of the table; and there he remained for a minute or two. 'Adela!'

‘Yes, Adela,’ said Bertram.

‘What a life my mother would lead her! She is fond of her now; very. But in that case I know that she would hate her.’

‘If I were you, I would make my wife the mistress of my house, not my mother.’

‘Ah! you do not understand, George.’

‘But perhaps you do not like Adela—perhaps you could not teach yourself to love her?’

‘Perhaps not,’ said Wilkinson. ‘And perhaps she could not teach herself to like me. But, ah! that is out of the question.’

‘There is nothing between you and Adela then?’ asked Bertram.

‘Oh, no; nothing.’

‘On your honour, nothing?’

‘Nothing at all. It is quite out of the question. My marrying, indeed!’

And then they took their bedroom candlesticks and went to their own rooms.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WOUNDED DOE.

It was a weary, melancholy household just then, that of Hurst Staple, and one may almost wonder that Bertram should have remained there ; but still he did remain. He had been there a fortnight, when he learnt that in three days' time Adela was to go to Littlebath. She was to go down with Miss Baker ; and was to remain there with her, or with Miss Todd if Miss Baker should go back to Hadley, till her own aunt should have returned.

'I don't know why you should be in such a hurry to get to Littlebath,' said Mrs. Wilkinson. 'We have been very glad to have you ; and I hope we have shown it.' As Arthur had evinced no symptoms of making love to Miss Gauntlet, the good lady had been satisfied, and now she felt somewhat slighted that her hospitality was not more valued.

But Adela explained in her own soft manner that it would be better for her to leave that neighbourhood; that her heart was sore there; that her sorrow for her father would be lighter if she were away. What hypocrites women are! Even Ophelia in her madness would pretend that she raved for her murdered father, when it was patent to all the world that she was mad for love for Hamlet. And now Adela must leave Hurst Staple because, forsooth, her poor old father lay buried at West Putford. Would not ten words have quieted that ghost for ever? But then, what is the use of a lady's speech but to conceal her thoughts?

Bertram had spoken to Arthur about Caroline's marriage, but he had as yet said no word on the subject to any one else. Mrs. Wilkinson had tried him once or twice, but in vain. He could not bare his bosom to Mrs. Wilkinson.

'So you are going, Adela?' he said the morning he had heard the news. They had all called her Adela in that house, and he had learned to do as others did. These intimacies will sometimes grow up in five days, though an acquaintance of twenty years will often not produce them.

'Yes, Mr. Bertram. I have been a great trouble to them here, and it is time that I should be gone.'

“Welcome the coming, speed the parting guest.” Had I a house, I should endeavour to act on that principle. I would never endeavour to keep a person who wished to go. But we shall all regret you. And then, Littlebath is not the place for you. You will never be happy at Littlebath.’

‘Why not?’

‘Oh, it is a wretched place; full of horse-jockeys and hags—of card-tables and false hair.’

‘I shall have nothing to do with the card-tables, and I hope not with the false hair—nor yet much, I suppose, with the horse-jockeys.’

‘There will still remain the worst of the four curses.’

‘Mr. Bertram, how can you be so evil-minded? I have had many happy days at Littlebath.’ And then she paused, for she remembered that her happy days there had all been passed with Caroline Waddington.

‘Yes, and I also have had happy days there,’ said he; ‘very happy. And I am sure of this—that they would have been happy still but for the influence of that wretched place.’

Adela could make no answer to this at the moment, so she went on hemming at her collar. Then, after a pause, she said, ‘I hope it will have no evil influence on me.’

‘I hope not—I hope not. But you are beyond such influences. It seems to me, if I may say so, that you are beyond all influences.’

‘Yes; as a fool is,’ she said, laughing.

‘No; but as a rock is. I will not say as ice, for ice will always melt.’

‘And do I never melt, Mr. Bertram? Has that which has made you so unhappy not moved me? Do you think that I can love Caroline as I do, and not grieve, and weep, and groan in the spirit? I do grieve; I have wept for it. I am not stone.’

And in this also there had been some craft. She had been as it were forced to guard the thoughts of her own heart; and had, therefore, turned the river of the conversation right through the heart of her companion.

‘For whom do you weep? for which of us do you weep?’ he asked.

‘For both; that, having so much to enjoy, you should between you have thrown it all away.’

‘She will be happy. That at any rate is a consolation to me. Though you will hardly believe that.’

‘I hope she will. I hope she will. But, oh! Mr. Bertram, it is so fearful a risk. What—what if she should not be? What if she shall find, when the time will be too late for finding

anything—what if she shall then find that she cannot love him?’

‘Love him!’ said the other with a sneer. ‘You do not know her. What need is there for love?’

‘Ah! do not be harsh to her; do not you be harsh to her.’

‘Harsh, no; I will not be harsh to her. I will be all kindness. And being kind, I ask what need is there for love? Looking at it in any light, of course she cannot love him.’

‘Cannot love him! why not?’

‘How is it possible? Had she loved me, could she have shaken off one lover and taken up another in two months? And if she never loved me; if for three years she could go on, never loving me—then what reason is there to think she should want such excitement now?’

‘But you—could you love her, and yet cast her from you?’

‘Yes; I could do it. I did do it—and were it to do again, it should be done again. I did love her. If I know what love is, if I can at all understand it, I did love her with all my heart. And yet—I will not say I cast her off; it would be unmanly as well as false; but I let her go.’

‘Ah! you did more than that, Mr. Bertram.’

‘I gave her back her troth; and she accepted it;—as it was her duty to do, seeing that her

wishes were then changed. I did no more than that.'

'Women, Mr. Bertram, well know that when married they must sometimes bear a sharp word. But the sharp word before marriage; that is very hard to be borne.'

'I measure my words——But why should I defend myself? Of course your verdict will be on your friend's side. I should hate you if it were not so. But, oh! Adela, if I have sinned, I have been punished. I have been punished heavily. Indeed, indeed, I have been punished.' And sitting down, he bowed himself on the table, and hid his face within his hands.

This was in the drawing-room, and before Adela could venture to speak to him again, one of the girls came into the room.

'Adela,' said she, 'we are waiting for you to go down to the school.'

'I am coming directly,' said Adela, jumping up, and still hoping that Mary would go on, so as to leave her one moment alone with Bertram. But Mary showed no sign of moving without her friend. Instead of doing so, she asked her cousin whether he had a headache?

'Not at all,' said he, looking up; 'but I am half asleep. This Hurst Staple is a sleepy place, I think. Where's Arthur?'

‘He’s in the study.’

‘Well, I’ll go into the study also. One can always sleep there without being disturbed.’

‘You’re very civil, master George.’ And then Adela followed her friend down to the school.

But she could not rest while the matter stood in this way. She felt that she had been both harsh and unjust to Bertram. She knew that the fault had been with Caroline; and yet she had allowed herself to speak of it as though he, and he only, had been to blame. She felt, moreover, an expressible tenderness for his sorrow. When he declared how cruel was his punishment, she could willingly have given him the sympathy of her tears. For were not their cases in many points the same?

She was determined to see him again before she went, and to tell him that she acquitted him; —that she knew the greater fault was not with him. This in itself would not comfort him; but she would endeavour so to put it that he might draw comfort from it.

‘I must see you for a moment alone, before I go,’ she said to him that evening in the drawing-room. ‘I go very early on Thursday morning. When can I speak to you? You are never up early, I know.’

‘ But I will be to-morrow. Will you be afraid to come out with me before breakfast ?’

‘ Oh no ! she would not be at all afraid,’ she said : and so the appointment was made.

‘ I know you’ll think me very foolish for giving this trouble,’ she began, in rather a confused way, ‘ and making so much about nothing.’

‘ No man thinks there is much ado about nothing when the ado is about himself,’ said Bertram, laughing.

‘ Well, but I know it is foolish. But I was unjust to you yesterday, and I could not leave you without confessing it.’

‘ How unjust, Adela ?’

‘ I said you had cast Caroline off.’

‘ Ah, no ! I certainly did not do that.’

‘ She wrote to me, and told me everything. She wrote very truly, I know ; and she did not say a word—not a word against you.’

‘ Did she not ? Well—no—I know she would not. And remember this, Adela : I do not say a word against her. Do tell her, not from me, you know, but of your own observation, that I do not say one word against her. I only say she did not love me.’

‘ Ah ! Mr. Bertram.’

‘ That is all ; and that is true. Adela, I have not much to give ; but I would give it all—all—

everything to have her back—to have her back as I used to think her. But if I could have her now—as I know her now—by raising this hand, I would not take her. But this imputes no blame to her. She tried to love me, but she could not.’

‘Ah! she did love you.’

‘Never!’ He almost shouted as he said this; and as he did so, he stood across his companion’s path. ‘Never! She never loved me. I know it now. What poor vile wretches we are! It is this I think that most torments me.’

And then they walked on. Adela had come there expressly to speak to him, but now she was almost afraid to speak. Her heart had been full of what it would utter, but now all utterance seemed to have left her. She had intended to console, but she did not dare to attempt it. There was a depth, almost a sublimity about his grief which kept her silent.

‘Oh! Adela,’ he said, ‘if you knew what it is to have an empty heart—or rather a heart not empty—that would fain be empty that you might again refill it. Dear Adela!’ And he put out his hand to take her own. She hardly knew why, but she let him take her hand. ‘Dear Adela; have you never sighed for the comfort of an empty heart? You probe my wounds to the bottom; may I not search your own?’

She did not answer him. Was it possible that she should answer such a question? Her eyes became suffused with tears, and she was unable to raise them from the ground. She could not recall her hand—not at that moment. She had come there to lecture him, to talk to him, to comfort him; and now she was unable to say a word. Did he know the secret of her heart; that secret which once and but once had involuntarily broken from out her lips? Had Caroline told him? Had she been so false to friendship—as false to friendship as she had been to love?

‘Adela! Adela! I would that we had met earlier in our lives. Yes, you and I.’ These last words he added after she had quickly rescued her hand from his grasp. Very quickly she withdrew it now. As quickly she lifted up her face, all covered as it was with tears, and endured the full weight of his gaze. What! was it possible that he knew how she had loved, and thought that her love had been for him!

‘Yes, you and I,’ he continued. ‘Even though your eyes flash upon me so sternly. You mean to say that had it been ever so early, that prize would have been impossible for me. Speak out, Adela. That is what you mean?’

‘Yes; it would have been impossible; impossible every way; impossible, that is, on both sides.’

‘Then you have not that empty heart, Adela? What else should make it impossible?’

‘Mr. Bertram, when I came here, I had no wish, no intention to talk about myself.’

‘Why not of yourself as well as of me? I say again, I would we had both met earlier. It might have been that I should have been saved from this shipwreck. I will speak openly to you, Adela. Why not?’ he added, seeing that she shrunk from him, and seemed as though she would move on quickly—away from his words.

‘Mr. Bertram, do not say that which it will be useless for you to have said.’

‘It shall not be useless. You are my friend, and friends should understand each other. You know how I have loved Caroline. You believe that I have loved her, do you not?’

‘Oh, yes; I do believe that.’

‘Well, you may; that at any rate is true. I have loved her. She will now be that man’s property, and I must love her no longer.’

‘No; not with that sort of love.’

‘That sort! Are there two sorts on which a man may run the changes, as he may from one room to another? I must wipe her out of my mind—out of my heart—or burn her out. I would not wish to love anything that he possesses.’

‘No!’ said she, ‘not his wife.’

‘Wife! she will never be his wife. She will never be bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, as I would have made her. It will be but a partnership between them, to be dissolved when they have made the most of their world’s trading.’

‘If you love her, Mr. Bertram, do not be so bitter in speaking of her.’

‘Bitter! I tell you that I think her quite right in what she does. If a woman cannot love, what better can she do than trade upon her beauty? But, there; let her go; I did not wish to speak of her.’

‘I was very wrong in asking you to walk with me this morning.’

‘No, Adela, not wrong; but very, very right. There, well, I will not ask you for your hand again, though it was but in friendship.’

‘In friendship I will give it you,’ and she stretched out her hand to him. It was ungloved, and very white and fair; a prettier hand than even Caroline could boast.

‘I must not take it. I must not lie to you, Adela. I am broken-hearted. I have loved; I have loved that woman with all my heart, with my very soul, with the utmost strength of my whole being—and now it has come to this. If I

know what a broken heart means, I have it here. But yet—yet—yet. Oh, Adela! I would fain try yet once again. I can do nothing for myself; nothing. If the world were there at my feet, wealth, power, glory, to be had for the stooping, I would not stoop to pick them, if I could not share them with—a friend. Adela, it is so sad to be alone!

‘Yes, it is sad. Is not sadness the lot of many of us?’

‘Yes; but nature bids us seek a cure when a cure is possible.’

‘I do not know what you wish me to understand, Mr. Bertram?’

‘Yes, Adela, you do; I think you do. I think I am honest and open. At any rate, I strive to be so. I think you do understand me.’

‘If I do, then the cure which you seek is impossible.’

‘Ah!’

‘Is impossible.’

‘You are not angry with me?’

‘Angry; no, not angry.’

‘And do not be angry now, if I speak openly again. I thought—I thought. But I fear that I shall pain you.’

‘I do not care for pain if any good can come of it.’

‘ I thought that you also had been wounded. In the woods, the stricken harts lie down together and lick each other’s wounds while the herd roams far away from them.’

‘ Is it so? Why do we hear then “of the poor sequestered stag, left and abandoned of his velvet friend?” No, Mr. Bertram, grief, I fear, must still be solitary.’

‘ And so, unendurable.’

‘ God still tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, now as he has ever done. But there is no sudden cure for these evils. The time will come when all this will be remembered, not without sorrow, but with a calm, quiet mourning that will be endurable; when your heart, now not broken as you say, but tortured, will be able to receive other images. But that time cannot come at once. Nor, I think, is it well that we should wish it. Those who have courage to love should have courage to suffer.’

‘ Yes, yes, yes. But if the courage be wanting? if one have it not? One cannot have such courage for the asking.’

‘ The first weight of the blow will stun the sufferer. I know that, Mr. Bertram. But that dull, dead, deathly feeling will wear off at last. You have but to work; to read, to write, to study. In that respect, you men are

more fortunate than we are. You have that which must occupy your thoughts.'

'And you, Adela—?'

'Do not speak of me. If you are generous, you will not do so. If I have in any way seemed to speak of myself, it is because you have made it unavoidable. What God has given me to bear is bearable;—though I would that he could have spared my poor father.' And, so saying, Adela at last gave way to tears. On that subject she might be allowed to weep.

Bertram said nothing to disturb her till they were near the house, and then he again held out his hand to her. 'As a true friend; I hope as a dear friend. Is it not so?' said he.

'Yes,' she answered, in her lowest voice, 'as a dear friend. But remember that I expect a friend's generosity and a friend's forbearance.' And so she made her way back to her own room, and appeared at breakfast in her usual sober guise, but with eyes that told no tales.

On the next morning she took her departure. The nearest station on the railway by which she was to go to Littlebath was distant about twelve miles, and it was proposed that she should be sent thither in Mrs. Wilkinson's phaëton. This, indeed, except the farm-yard cart, was the only vehicle which belonged to the parsonage, and

was a low four-wheeled carriage, not very well contrived for the accommodation of two moderate-sized people in front, and of two immoderately-small people on the hind seat. Mrs. Wilkinson habitually drove it herself, with one of her daughters beside her, and with two others—those two whose legs had been found by measurement to be the shortest—in durance vile behind; but when so packed, it was clear to all men that the capacity of the phaëton was exhausted. Now the first arrangement proposed was, that Arthur should drive the phaëton, and that Sophy should accompany Adela to the station. But Sophy, in so arranging, had forgotten that her friend had a bag, a trunk, and a bonnet-box, the presence of which at Littlebath would be indispensable; and, therefore, at the last moment, when the phaëton came to the door with the luggage fastened on the hinder seat, it was discovered for the first time that Sophy must be left behind.

Arthur Wilkinson would willingly have given up his position, and George Bertram would willingly have taken it. Adela also would have been well pleased at such a change. But though all would have been pleased, it could not be effected. The vicar could not very well proclaim that, as his sister was not to accompany

him and shield him, he would not act as charioteer to Miss Gauntlet ; nor could the lady object to be driven by her host. So at last they started from the vicarage door with many farewell kisses, and a large paper of sandwiches. Who is it that consumes the large packets of sandwiches with which parting guests are always laden ? I imagine that station-masters' dogs are mainly fed upon them.

The first half-mile was occupied, on Wilkin-son's part, in little would-be efforts to make his companion more comfortable. He shifted himself about into the furthest corner so as to give her more room ; he pulled his cloak out from under her, and put it over her knees to guard her from the dust ; and recommended her three times to put up her parasol. Then he had a word or two to say to the neighbours ; but that only lasted as long as he was in his own parish. Then he came to a hill which gave him an opportunity of walking ; and on getting in again he occupied half a minute in taking out his watch, and assuring Adela that she would not be too late for the train.

But when all this was done, the necessity for conversation still remained. They had hardly been together—thrown for conversation on each other as they now were—since that day when Arthur had walked over for the last time to

West Putford. Reader, do you remember it? Hardly; for have not all the fortunes and misfortunes of our more prominent hero intervened since that chapter was before you?

‘I hope you will find yourself comfortable at Littlebath,’ he said at last.

‘Oh, yes; that is, I shall be when my aunt comes home. I shall be at home then, you know.’

‘But that will be some time?’

‘I fear so; and I dread greatly going to this Miss Todd, whom I have never seen. But you see, dear Miss Baker must go back to Hadley soon, and Miss Todd has certainly been very good-natured in offering to take me.’

Then there was another silence, which lasted for about half a mile.

‘My mother would have been very glad if you would have stayed at the parsonage till your aunt’s return; and so would my sisters—and so should I.’

‘You are all very kind — too kind,’ said Adela.

Then came another pause, perhaps for a quarter of a mile, but it was up-hill work, and the quarter of a mile passed by very slowly.

‘It seems so odd that you should go away from us, whom you have known so long, to stay with Miss Todd, whom you never have even seen.’

‘ I think change of scene will be good for me, Mr. Wilkinson.’

‘ Well, perhaps so.’ And then the other quarter of a mile made away with itself. ‘ Come, get along, Dumpling.’ This was said to the fat steed ; for they had now risen to level ground.

‘ Our house, I know, must be very stupid for you. It is much changed from what it was ; is it not ?’

‘ Oh, I don’t know.’

‘ Yes, it is. There is neither the same spirit, nor the same good-will. We miss my father greatly.’

‘ Ah, yes. I can feel for you there. It is a loss ; a great loss.’

‘ I sometimes think it unfortunate that my mother should have remained at the vicarage after my father’s death.’

‘ You have been very good to her, I know.’

‘ I have done my best, Adela.’ It was the first time she had distinctly heard him call her by her Christian name since she had come to stay with them. ‘ But I have failed. She is not happy there ; nor, indeed, for that matter, am I.’

‘ A man should be happy when he does his duty.’

‘ We none of us do that so thoroughly as to

require no other source of happiness. Go on, Dumpling, and do your duty.'

'I see that you are very careful in doing yours.'

'Perhaps you will hardly believe me, but I wish Lord Stapledean had never given me the living.'

'Well; it is difficult to believe that. Think what it has been for your sisters.'

'I know we should have been very poor, but we should not have starved. I had my fellowship, and I could have taken pupils. I am sure we should have been happier. And then—'

'And then—well?' said Adela; and as she spoke, her heart was not quite at rest within her breast.

'Then I should have been free. Since I took that living, I have been a slave.' Again he paused a moment, and whipped the horse; but it was only now for a moment that he was silent. 'Yes, a slave. Do you not see what a life I live? I could be content to sacrifice myself to my mother if the sacrifice were understood. But you see how it is with her. Nothing that I can do will satisfy her; and yet for her I have sacrificed everything—everything.'

'A sacrifice is no sacrifice if it be agreeable. The sacrifice consists in its being painful.'

‘ Well, I suppose so. I say that to myself so often. It is the only consolation I have.’

‘ Not that I think your home should be made uncomfortable to you. There is no reason why it should be. At least, I should think not.’ She spoke with little spasmodic efforts, which, however, did not betray themselves to her companion, who seemed to her to be almost more engaged with Dumpling than with the conversation. It certainly had been through no wish of hers that they were thus talking of his household concerns ; but as they were speaking of them, she was forced into a certain amount of hypocrisy. It was a subject on which she could not speak openly.

There was then another hill to be walked up, and Adela thought there would be no more of it. The matter had come up by accident, and would now, probably, drop away. But no. Whether by design, or from chance, or because no other topic presented itself, Arthur went back to the subject, and did so now in a manner that was peculiarly startling to Miss Gauntlet.

‘ Do you remember my calling once at West Putford, soon after I got the living ? It is a long time ago now, and I don’t suppose you do remember it.’

‘ Yes, I do ; very well.’

‘ And do you remember what I told you then ?’

‘What was it?’ said Adela. It clearly is the duty of a young lady on very many occasions to be somewhat hypocritical.

‘If there be any man to whose happiness marriage is more necessary than to that of another, it is a country clergyman.’

‘Yes, I can believe that. That is, if there be not ladies of his own family living with him.’

‘I do not know that that makes any difference.’

‘Oh, yes; it must make a difference. I think that a man must be very wretched who has no one to look after his house.’

‘And is that your idea of the excellence of a wife? I should have expected something higher from you, Adela. I suppose you think, then, that if a man have his linen looked after, and his dinner cooked, that is sufficient.’ Poor Adela! It must be acknowledged that this was hard on her.

‘No, I do not think that sufficient.’

‘It would seem so from what you say.’

‘Then what I said belied my thoughts. It seems to me, Mr. Wilkinson, since you drive me to speak out, that the matter is very much in your own hands. You are certainly a free agent. You know better than I can tell you what your duty to your mother and sisters requires.’ Cir-

cumstances have made them dependent on you, and you certainly are not the man to disacknowledge the burden.'

'Certainly not.'

'No, certainly not. But, having made up my mind to that, I would not, were I you, allow myself to be a slave.'

'But what can I do?'

'You mean that you would be a poor man, were you—were you to give up your fellowship and at the same time take upon yourself other cares as well. Do as other poor men do.'

'I know no other man situated as I am.'

'But you know men who are much worse situated as regards their worldly means. Were you to give your mother the half of your income, you would still, I presume, be richer than Mr. Young.' Mr. Young was the curate of a neighbouring parish, who had lately married on his curacy.

It will be said by my critics, especially by my female critics, that in saying this, Adela went a long way towards teaching Mr. Wilkinson the way to woo. Indeed, she brought that accusation against herself, and not lightly. But she was, as she herself had expressed it, driven in the cause of truth to say what she had said. Nor did she, in her heart of hearts, believe that Mr. Wilkinson had any thought of her in saying what she did

say. Her mind on that matter had been long made up. She knew herself to be 'the poor sequestered stag, left and abandoned by his velvet friend.' She had no feeling in the matter which amounted to the slightest hope. He had asked her for her counsel, and she had given him the only counsel which she honestly could give.

Therefore, bear lightly on her, oh my critics! Bear lightly on her especially, my critics feminine. To the worst of your wrath and scorn I willingly subject the other lovers with whom my tale is burthened.

'Yes, I should be better off than Young,' said Wilkinson, as though he were speaking to himself. 'But that is not the point. I do not know that I have ever looked at it exactly in that light. There is the house, the parsonage I mean. It is full of women'—'twas thus irreverently that he spoke of his mother and sisters—'what other woman would come among them?'

'Oh, that is the treasure for which you have to search'—this she said laughingly. The bitterness of the day was over with her; or at least it then seemed so. She was not even thinking of herself when she said this.

'Would you come to such a house, Adela? You, you yourself?'

'You mean to ask whether, if, as regards other

circumstances, I was minded to marry, I would then be deterred by a mother-in-law and sister-in-law ?'

'Yes, just so,' said Wilkinson, timidly.

'Well, that would depend much upon how well I might like the gentleman ; something also upon how much I might like the ladies.'

'A man's wife should always be mistress in his own house.'

'Oh yes, of course.'

'And my mother is determined to be mistress in that house.'

'Well, I will not recommend you to rebel against your mother. Is that the station, Mr. Wilkinson ?'

'Yes—that's the station. Dear me, we have forty minutes to wait yet !'

'Don't mind me, Mr. Wilkinson. I shall not in the least dislike waiting by myself.'

'Of course, I shall see you off. Dumpling won't run away ; you may be sure of that. There is very little of the runaway class to be found at Hurst Staple Parsonage ; except you, Adela.'

'You don't call me a runaway, I hope ?'

'You run away from us just when we are beginning to feel the comfort of your being with us. There, he won't catch cold now ;' and so having

thrown a rug over Dumpling's back, he followed Adela into the station.

I don't know anything so tedious as waiting at a second-class station for a train. There is the ladies' waiting-room, into which gentlemen may not go, and the gentlemen's waiting-room, in which the porters generally smoke, and the refreshment room, with its dirty counter covered with dirtier cakes. And there is the platform, which you walk up and down till you are tired. You go to the ticket-window half a dozen times for your ticket, having been warned by the company's bills that you must be prepared to start at least ten minutes before the train is due. But the man inside knows better, and does not open the little hole to which you have to stoop your head till two minutes before the time named for your departure. Then there are five fat farmers, three old women, and a butcher at the aperture, and not finding yourself equal to struggling among them for a place, you make up your mind to be left behind. At last, however, you do get your ticket just as the train comes up; but hearing that exciting sound, you nervously cram your change into your pocket without counting it, and afterwards feel quite convinced that you have lost a shilling in the transaction.

'Twas somewhat in this way that the forty

minutes were passed by Wilkinson and Adela. Nothing of any moment was spoken between them till he took her hand for the last time. 'Adela,' he then whispered to her, 'I shall think much of what you have said to me, very much. I do so wish you were not leaving us. I wonder whether you would be surprised if I were to write to you?' But the train was gone before she had time to answer.

Two days afterwards, Bertram also left them. 'Arthur,' he said, as he took leave of the vicar, 'if I, who have made such a mess of it myself, may give advice on such a subject, I would not leave Adela Gauntlet long at Littlebath if I were you.'

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SOLICITOR-GENERAL IN LOVE.

CAROLINE WADDINGTON was at Hadley when she received and accepted the proposal made to her by Sir Henry Harcourt. It may be conceived that the affair was arranged without any very great amount of romance. Sir Henry indeed was willing, in a hurried manner, to throw himself at the lady's feet, to swear by her fair hand that he loved her as man never yet had loved, and to go to work in the fashion usually most approved by young ladies. In a hurried manner, I say; for just at this moment he was being made solicitor-general, and had almost too many irons in the fire to permit of a prolonged dallying. But Caroline would have none of it, either hurried or not hurried. Whatever might be the case with Sir Henry, she had gone through that phase of life, and now declared to herself that she did not want any more of it.

Sir Henry did not find the task of gaining his bride very difficult. He had succeeded in establishing a sort of intimacy with old Mr. Bertram, and it appeared that permission to run down to Hadley and run back again had already been accorded to him before Miss Baker and Caroline arrived there. He never slept, though he sometimes dined in the house; but he had always something to talk about when an excuse for going to Hadley was required. Mr. Bertram had asked him something about some investment, and he had found out this something; or he wanted to ask Mr. Bertram's advice on some question as to his political career. At this period he was, or professed to be, very much guided in his public life by Mr. Bertram's opinion.

And thus he fell in with Caroline. On the first occasion of his doing so, he contrived to whisper to her his deep sympathy with her sorrow; on his second visit, he spoke more of himself and less of Bertram; on his third, he alluded only to her own virtues; on his fourth, he asked her to be Lady Harcourt. She told him that she would be Lady Harcourt; and, as far as she was concerned, there was an end of it for the present.

Then Sir Henry proposed that the day should be named. On this subject also he found her ready to accommodate him. She had no coy

scruples as to the time. He suggested that it should be before Christmas. Very well; let it be before Christmas. Christmas is a cold time for marrying; but this was to be a cold marriage. Christmas, however, for the fortunate is made warm with pudding, ale, and spiced beef. They intended to be among the fortunate, the fortunate in place, and money, and rank; and they would, as best they might, make themselves warm with the best pudding, ale, and spiced beef which the world could afford them.

Sir Henry was alive to the delight of being the possessor of so many charms, and was somewhat chagrined that for the present he was so cruelly debarred from any part of his legitimate enjoyment. Though he was a solicitor-general, he could have been content to sit for ten minutes with his arm round Caroline's waist; and—in spite of the energy with which he was preparing a bill for the regulation of County Courts, as to which he knew that he should have that terrible demi-god, Lord Boanerges, down upon his shoulders—still he would fain have stolen a kiss or two. But Caroline's waist and Caroline's kisses were to be his only after Christmas; and to be his only as payment accorded for her new rank, and for her fine new house in Eaton Square.

How is it that girls are so potent to refuse such

favours at one time, and so impotent in preventing their exaction at another? Sir Henry, we may say, had every right to demand some trifling payment in advance; but he could not get a doit. Should we be violating secrecy too much if we suggested that George Bertram had had some slight partial success even when he had no such positive claim—some success which had of course been in direct opposition to the lady's will?

Miss Baker had now gone back to Littlebath, either to receive Adela Gauntlet, or because she knew that she should be more comfortable in her own rooms than in her uncle's dismal house—or perhaps because Sir Lionel was there. She had, however, gone back, and Caroline remained mistress for the time of her grandfather's household.

The old man now seemed to have dropped all mystery in the matter. He generally, indeed, spoke of Caroline as Miss Waddington; but he heard her talked of as his granddaughter without expressing anger, and with Sir Henry he himself so spoke of her. He appeared to be quite reconciled to the marriage. In spite of all his entreaties to George, all his attempted bribery, his broken-hearted sorrow when he failed, he seemed to be now content. Indeed, he had made no opposition to the match. When Caroline had freely spoken to him about it, he made some little snappish re-

mark as to the fickleness of women; but he at the same time signified that he would not object.

Why should he? Sir Henry Harcourt was in every respect a good match for his granddaughter. He had often been angry with George Bertram because George had not prospered in the world. Sir Henry had prospered signally—would probably prosper much more signally. Might it not be safely predicated of a man who was solicitor-general before he was thirty, that he would be lord-chancellor or lord chief-justice, or at any rate some very bigwig indeed before he was fifty? So of course Mr. Bertram did not object.

But he had not signified his acquiescence in any very cordial way. Rich old men, when they wish to be cordial on such occasions, have but one way of evincing cordiality. It is not by a pressure of the hand, by a kind word, by an approving glance. Their embrace conveys no satisfaction; their warmest words, if unsupported, are very cold. An old man, if he intends to be cordial on such an occasion, must speak of *thousands of pounds*. ‘My dear young fellow, I approve altogether. She shall have *twenty thousand pounds* the day she becomes yours.’ Then is the hand shaken with true fervour; then is real cor-

diality expressed and felt. 'What a dear old man grandpapa is! Is there any one like him? Dear old duck! He is going to be so generous to Harry.'

But Mr. Bertram said nothing about twenty thousand pounds, nothing about ten, nothing about money at all till he was spoken to on the subject. It was Sir Henry's special object not to be pressing on this point, to show that he was marrying Caroline without any sordid views, and that his admiration for Mr. Bertram had no bearing at all on that gentleman's cash-box. He did certainly make little feints at Mr. Pritchett; but Mr. Pritchett merely wheezed and said nothing. Mr. Pritchett was not fond of the Harcourt interest; and seemed to care but little for Miss Caroline, now that she had transferred her affections.

But it was essentially necessary that Sir Henry Harcourt should know what was to be done. If he were to have nothing, it was necessary that he should know that. He had certainly counted on having something, and on having something immediately. He was a thoroughly hard-working man of business, but yet he was not an economical man. A man who lives before the world in London, and lives chiefly among men of fortune, can hardly be economical. He had not

therefore any large sum of money in hand. He was certainly in receipt of a large income, but then his expenses were large. He had taken and now had to furnish an expensive house in Eaton Square, and a few thousand pounds in ready money were almost indispensable to him.

One Friday—this was after his return to town from the ten days' grouse-shooting, and occurred at the time when he was most busy with the County Courts—he wrote to Caroline to say that he would go down to Hadley on Saturday afternoon, stay there over the Sunday, and return to town on the Monday morning; that is to say, he would do so if perfectly agreeable to Mr. Bertram.

He went down, and found everything prepared for him that was suitable for a solicitor-general. They did not put before him merely roast mutton or boiled beef. He was not put to sleep in the back bedroom without a carpet. Such treatment had been good enough for George Bertram; but for the solicitor-general all the glories of Hadley were put forth. He slept in the best bedroom, which was damp enough no doubt, seeing that it was not used above twice in the year; and went through at dinner a whole course of *entrées*, such as *entrées* usually are in the suburban districts. This was naturally gratifying to him as a soli-

citor-general, and fortified him for the struggle he was to make.

He had some hope that he should have a *tête-à-tête* with Caroline on the Saturday evening. But neither fate nor love would favour him. He came down just before dinner, and there was clearly no time then: infirm as the old man was, he sat at the dinner-table; and though Sir Henry was solicitor-general, there was no second room, no withdrawing-room prepared for his reception.

'Grandpapa does not like moving,' said Caroline, as she got up to leave the room after dinner; 'so perhaps, Sir Henry, you will allow me to come down to tea here? We always sit here of an evening.'

'I never could bear to live in two rooms,' said the old man. 'When one is just warm and comfortable, one has to go out into all the draughts of the house. That's the fashion, I know. But I hope you'll excuse me, Sir Henry, for not liking it.'

Sir Henry of course did excuse him. There was nothing he himself liked so much as sitting cosy over a dining-room fire.

In about an hour Caroline did come down again; and in another hour, before the old man went, she again vanished for the night. Sir Henry had made up his mind not to speak to

Mr. Bertram about money that evening; so he also soon followed Caroline, and sat down to work upon the County Courts in his own bedroom.

On the next morning Sir Henry and Caroline went to church. All the Hadleyians of course knew of the engagement, and were delighted to have an opportunity of staring at the two turtle-doves. A solicitor-general in love is a sight to behold; and the clergyman had certainly no right to be angry if the attention paid to his sermon was something less fixed than usual. Before dinner, there was luncheon; and then Sir Henry asked his betrothed if she would take a walk with him. 'Oh, certainly, she would be delighted.' Her church-going bonnet was still on, and she was quite ready. Sir Henry also was ready; but as he left the room he stooped over Mr. Bertram's chair and whispered to him, 'Could I speak to you a few words before dinner, sir; on business? I know I ought to apologize, this being Sunday.'

'Oh, I don't care about Sunday,' said the stubborn-minded old man. 'I shall be here till I go to bed, I suppose, if you want me.'

And then they started on their walk. Oh, those lovers' rambles! A man as he grows old can perhaps teach himself to regret but few of

the sweets which he is compelled to leave behind him. He can learn to disregard most of his youth's pleasures, and to live contented though he has outlived them. The polka and the waltz were once joyous; but he sees now that the work was warm, and that one was often compelled to perform it in company for which one did not care. Those picnics too were nice; but it may be a question whether a good dinner at his own dinner-table is not nicer. Though fat and over forty he may still ride to hounds, and as for boating and cricketing, after all they were but boy's play. For those things one's soul does not sigh. But, ah! those lovers' walks, those loving lovers' rambles. Tom Moore is usually somewhat sugary and mawkish; but in so much he was right. If there be an Elysium on earth, it is this. They are done and over for us, oh, my compatriots! Never again, unless we are destined to rejoin our houris in heaven, and to saunter over fields of asphodel in another and a greener youth—never again shall those joys be ours! And what can ever equal them? 'Twas then, between sweet hedgerows, under green oaks, with our feet rustling on the crisp leaves, that the world's cold reserve was first thrown off, and we found that those we loved were not goddesses made of buckram and brocade, but human beings

like ourselves, with blood in their veins, and hearts in their bosoms — veritable children of Adam like ourselves.

‘Gin a body meet a body comin’ through the rye.’ Ah, how delicious were those meetings! How convinced we were that there was no necessity for loud alarm! How fervently we agreed with the poet! My friends, born together with me in the consulship of Lord Liverpool, all that is done and over for us. We shall never gang that gait’ again.

There is a melancholy in this that will tinge our thoughts, let us draw ever so strongly on our philosophy. We can still walk with our wives; — and that is pleasant too, very — of course. But there was more animation in it when we walked with the same ladies under other names. Nay, sweet spouse, mother of dear bairns, who hast so well done thy duty; but this was so, let thy brows be knit never so angrily. That lord of thine has been indifferently good to thee, and thou to him has been more than good. Up-hill together have ye walked peaceably labouring; and now arm-in-arm ye shall go down the gradual slope which ends below there in the green churchyard. ’Tis good and salutary to walk thus. But for the full cup of joy, for the brimming spring-tide of human bliss, oh, give me back, give me back — — —!

Well, well, well; it is nonsense; I know it; but may not a man dream now and again in his evening nap and yet do no harm?

Vici puellis nuper idoneus, et militavi. How well Horace knew all about it! But that hanging up of the gittern—. One would fain have put it off, had falling hairs, and marriage-vows, and obesity have permitted it. Nay, is it not so, old friend of the grizzled beard? Dost thou not envy that smirk young knave with his five lustrums, though it goes hard with him to purchase his kid-gloves? He dines for one-and-twopence at an eating-house; but what cares Maria where he dines? He rambles through the rye with his empty pockets, and at the turn of the field-path Maria will be there to meet him. Envy him not; thou hast had thy walk; but lend him rather that thirty shillings that he asks of thee. So shall Maria's heart be glad as she accepts his golden brooch.

But for our friend Sir Henry every joy was present. Youth and wealth and love were all his, and his all together. He was but eight-and-twenty, was a member of Parliament, solicitor-general, owner of a house in Eaton Square, and possessor of as much well-trained beauty as was to be found at that time within the magic circle of any circumambient crinoline within the bills

of mortality. Was it not sweet for him to wander through the rye? Had he not fallen upon an Elysium, a very paradise of earthly joys? Was not his spring-tide at the full flood?

And so they started on their walk. It was the first that they had ever taken together. What Sir Henry may have done before in that line this history says not. A man who is solicitor-general at eight-and-twenty can hardly have had time for much. But the practice which he perhaps wanted, Caroline had had. There had been walks as well as rides at Littlebath; and walks also, though perhaps of doubtful joy, amidst those graves below the walls of Jerusalem.

And so they started. There is—or perhaps we should say was; for time and railways, and straggling new suburban villas, may now have destroyed it all; but there is, or was, a pretty woodland lane, running from the back of Hadley church, through the last remnants of what once was Enfield Chase. How many lovers' feet have crushed the leaves that used to lie in autumn along that pretty lane! Well, well; there shall not be another word in that strain. I speak solely now of the time here present to Sir Henry; all former days and former roamings there shall be clean forgotten. The solicitor-general now thither wends his way, and love and beauty

attend upon his feet. See how he opens the gate that stands by the churchyard paling? Does it stand there yet, I wonder? Well, well; we will say it does.

‘It is a beautiful day for a walk,’ said Sir Henry.

‘Yes, very beautiful,’ said Caroline.

‘There is nothing I am so fond of as a long walk,’ said the gentleman.

‘It is very nice,’ said the lady. ‘But I do not know that I care for going very far to-day. I am not quite strong at present.’

‘Not strong?’ And the solicitor-general put on a look of deep alarm.

‘Oh, there is nothing the matter with me; but I am not quite strong for walking. I am out of practice; and my boots are not quite of the right sort.’

‘They don’t hurt you, I hope.’

‘Oh, no; they don’t actually hurt me. They’ll do very well for to-day.’ And then there was a short pause, and they got on the green grass which runs away into the chase in front of the parsonage windows. I wonder whether wickets are ever standing there now on the summer afternoons!

They were soon as much alone—or nearly so—as lovers might wish to be; quite enough so for

Caroline. Some curious eyes were still peeping, no doubt, to see how the great lawyer looked when he was walking with the girl of his heart; to see how the rich miser's granddaughter looked when she was walking with the man of her heart. And perhaps some voices were whispering that she had changed her lover; for in these rural seclusions everything is known by everybody. But neither the peepers nor the whisperers interfered with the contentment of the fortunate pair.

'I hope you are happy, Caroline?' said Sir Henry, as he gently squeezed the hand that was so gently laid upon his arm.

'Happy! oh yes—I am happy. I don't believe you know in a great deal of very ecstatic happiness. I never did.'

'But I hope you are rationally happy—not discontented—at any rate, not regretful? I hope you believe that I shall do my best, my very best, to make you happy?'

'Oh, yes; I quite believe that. We must each think of the other's comfort. After all, that I take it is the great thing in married life.'

'I don't expect you to be passionately in love with me—not as yet, Caroline.'

'No. Let neither of us expect that, Sir Henry. Passionate love, I take it, rarely lasts

long, and is very troublesome while it does last. Mutual esteem is very much more valuable.'

'But, Caroline, I would have you believe in my love.'

'Oh, yes; I do believe in it. Why else should you wish to marry me? I think too well of myself to feel it strange that you should love me. But love with you, and with me also for the future, will be subordinate to other passions.'

Sir Henry did not altogether like that reference to the past which was conveyed in the word future; but, however, he bore it without wincing.

'You know so thoroughly the history of the last three years,' she continued, 'that it would be impossible for me to deceive you if I could. But, if I know myself, under no circumstances would I have done so. I have loved once, and no good has come of it. It was contrary to my nature to do so—to love in that mad passionate self-sacrificing manner. But yet I did. I think I may say with certainty that I never shall be so foolish again.'

'You have suffered lately, Caroline; and as the sore still smarts, you hardly yet know what happiness may be in store for you.'

'Yes; I have suffered,' and he felt from the touch on his arm that her whole body shuddered.

He walked on in silence for awhile considering within himself. Why should he marry this girl, rejected of her former lover, who now hung upon his arm? He was now at the very fullest tide of his prosperity; he had everything to offer which mothers wish for their daughters, and which daughters wish for themselves. He had income, rank, name, youth, and talent. Why should he fling his rich treasures at the feet of a proud minx who in taking them swore that she could not love him? Would it not be better for him to recede? A word he well knew would do it; for her pride was true pride. He felt in his heart that it was not assumed. He had only to say that he was not contented with this cold lack of love, and she would simply desire him to lead her back to her home and leave her there. It would be easy enough for him to get his head from out the noose.

But it was this very easiness, perhaps, which made him hesitate. She knew her own price, and was not at all anxious to dispose of herself a cheap bargain. If you, sir, have a horse to sell, never appear anxious for the sale. That rule is well understood among those who deal in horses. If you, madam, have a daughter to sell, it will be well for you also to remember this. Or, my young friend, if you have yourself to sell, the

same rule holds good. But it is hard to put an old head on young shoulders. Hard as the task is, however, it would seem to have been effected as regards Caroline Waddington.

And then Sir Henry looked at her. Not exactly with his present eyesight as then at that moment existing ; for seeing that she was walking by his side, he could not take the comprehensive view which his taste and mind required. But he looked at her searchingly with the eyesight of his memory, and found that she exactly tallied with what his judgment demanded. That she was very beautiful, no man had ever doubted. That she was now in the full pride of her beauty was to him certain. And then her beauty was of that goddess class which seems for so long a period to set years at defiance. It was produced by no girlish softness, by no perishable mixture of white and red ; it was not born of a sparkling eye, and a ripe lip, and a cherry cheek. To her face belonged lines of contour, severe, lovely, and of ineradicable grace. It was not when she smiled and laughed that she most pleased. She did not charm only when she spoke ; though, indeed, the expression of her speaking face was perfect. But she had the beauty of a marble bust. It would not be easy even for Sir Henry Harcourt, even for a young solicitor-general, to

find a face more beautiful with which to adorn his drawing-room.

And then she had that air of fashion, that look of being able to look down the unfashionable, which was so much in the eyes of Sir Henry; though in those of George Bertram it had been almost a demerit. With Caroline, as with many women, this was an appearance rather than a reality. She had not moved much among high people; she had not taught herself to despise those of her own class, the women of Littlebath, the Todds and the Adela Gauntlets; but she looked as though she would be able to do so. And it was fitting she should have such a look if ever she were to be the wife of a solicitor-general.

And then Sir Henry thought of Mr. Bertram's coffers. Ah! if he could only be let into that secret, it might be easy to come to a decision. That the old man had quarrelled with his nephew, he was well aware. That George, in his pig-headed folly, would make no overtures towards a reconciliation; of that also he was sure. Was it not probable that at any rate a great portion of that almost fabulous wealth would go to the man's granddaughter? There was doubtless risk; but then one must run some risk in everything. It might be, if he could play his cards wisely, that he would get it all—that he would be placed in a

position to make even the solicitor-generalship beneath his notice.

And so, in spite of Caroline's coldness, he resolved to persevere.

Having thus made up his mind, he turned the conversation to another subject.

'You liked the house on the whole; did you?' Caroline during the past week had been up to see the new house in Eaton Square.

'Oh, yes; very much. Nothing could be nicer. Only I am afraid it's expensive.' This was a subject on which Caroline could talk to him.

'Not particularly,' said Sir Henry. 'Of course one can't get a house in London for nothing. I shall have rather a bargain of that if I can pay the money down. The great thing is whether you like it.'

'I was charmed with it. I never saw prettier drawing-rooms—never. And the bedrooms for a London house are so large and airy.'

'Did you go into the dining-room?'

'Oh, yes; I went in.'

'There's room for four-and-twenty, is there not?'

'Well, I don't know. I can't give an opinion about that. You could have three times that number at supper.'

‘I’m not thinking of suppers ; but I’m sure you could. Kitchen’s convenient, eh ?’

‘Very—so at least aunt Mary said.’

‘And now about the furniture. You can give me two or three days in town, can’t you ?’

‘Oh, yes ; if you require it. But I would trust your taste in all those matters.’

‘My taste ! I have neither taste nor time. If you won’t mind going to ——’

And so the conversation went on for another fifteen minutes, and then they were at home. Caroline’s boots had begun to tease her, and their walk, therefore, had not been prolonged to a great distance.

Ah, me ! again I say how pleasant, how delightful were those lovers’ walks !

Then Caroline went up to her bedroom, and Sir Henry sat himself down near Mr. Bertram’s chair in the dining-room.

‘I wanted to speak to you, sir,’ said he, rushing at once into the midst of his subject, ‘about Caroline’s settlement. It is time that all that should be arranged. I would have made my lawyer see Pritchett ; but I don’t know that Pritchett has any authority to act for you in such matters.’

‘Act for me ! Pritchett has no authority to act—nor have I either.’ This little renunciation

of his granddaughter's affairs was no more than Sir Henry expected. He was, therefore, neither surprised nor disgusted.

'Well! I only want to know who has the authority. I don't anticipate any great difficulty. Caroline's fortune is not very large; but of course it must be settled. Six thousand pounds, I believe.'

'Four, Sir Henry. That is, if I am rightly informed.'

'Four, is it? I was told six—I think by George Bertram in former days. I should of course prefer six; but if it be only four, why we must make the best of it.'

'She has only four of her own,' said the old man, somewhat mollified.

'Have you any objection to my telling you what I would propose to do?'

'No objection in life, Sir Henry.'

'My income is large; but I want a little ready money at present to conclude the purchase of my house, and to furnish it. Would you object to the four thousand pounds being paid into my hands, if I insure my life for six for her benefit? Were her fortune larger, I should of course propose that my insurance should be heavier.'

Sir Henry was so very reasonable that Mr. Bertram by degrees thawed. He would make

his granddaughter's fortune, six thousand as he had always intended. This should be settled on her, the income of course going to her husband. He should insure his life for four thousand more on her behalf; and Mr. Bertram would lend Sir Henry three thousand for his furniture.

Sir Henry agreed to this, saying to himself that such a loan from Mr. Bertram was equal to a gift. Mr. Bertram himself seemed to look at it in a different light. 'Mind, Sir Henry, I shall expect the interest to the day. I will only charge you four per cent. And it must be made a bond debt.'

'Oh, certainly,' said Sir Henry.

And so the affair of the settlement was arranged.

CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. LEAKE OF RISSBURY.

ADELA GAUNTLET reached Littlebath without any adventures, and at the station she met Miss Baker ready to take her and her boxes in charge. She soon learned what was to be her fate for that autumn. It was imperatively necessary that Miss Baker should go up to town in a week or two. 'There are such hundreds of things to be done about furniture and all that, you know,' said Miss Baker, looking rather grand as she spoke of her niece's great match; and yet doing so with the least possible amount of intentional pride or vanity. Adela, of course, acknowledged that there must be hundreds of things, and expressed her deepest regret that she should be so much in the way. Perhaps she almost wished that she had remained at Hurst Staple.

'Not at all in the way, my dear,' said Miss Baker; 'I shall be back again in a week at the

furthest, and Miss Todd will be delighted to have you for that time. Indeed, she would be very much disappointed now, and offended too if you did not go. But all the same, I would not leave you, only that Sir Henry insists that Caroline should choose all the things herself; and of course he has not time to go with her—and then the responsibility is so great. Why, I suppose she will have to lay out about two thousand pounds!’

‘But what sort of a person is Miss Todd?’ asked Adela.

‘Oh, an extremely nice person; you’ll like her amazingly—so lively, so good-natured, so generous; and very clever too. Perhaps, for her age, she’s a little too fond—’

‘Too fond of what? You were going to say dress, I suppose.’

‘No, indeed. I can’t say that there’s anything to blame her for in that. She dresses very handsomely, but always plain. No; what I was going to say is, that perhaps for a woman of her age—she is a little too fond of gentlemen’s attention.’

‘Caroline told me that she was the most confirmed old maid she knew—an old maid who gloried in being an old maid.’

‘I don’t know about that, my dear; but if a

certain gentleman were to ask her, I don't think she'd glory in it much longer. But she's a very nice person, and you'll like her very much.'

Miss Baker did go up to town, leaving Adela to Miss Todd's hospitality. She did go up, but in doing so resolved to return as soon as possible. Sir Lionel was now in the Paragon nearly every other day. To be sure, he did generally call in Montpellier Terrace on the alternate days. But then there was a reason for that. They had to talk about George and Caroline. What possible reason could there be for his going to the Paragon?

Adela was rather frightened when she found herself left at Miss Todd's lodgings; though that lady's manner to her was not such as need have inspired much awe.

'Now, my dear,' she said, 'don't mind me in the least. Do just whatever you like. If I only knew what you did like, you should have it if I could get it. What are you fond of now? Shall I ask some young people here to-night?'

'Oh, no, Miss Todd; not for me. I have never been much in society, and certainly do not wish for it at present.'

'Well, society is not a bad thing. You don't play cards, I suppose?'

'I don't know one card from another.'

‘ You’d just suit Mr. O’Callaghan then. Are you fond of young clergymen ? There’s one here might just suit you. All the young ladies are dying for him.’

‘ Then pray don’t let me interfere with them, Miss Todd.’

‘ Perhaps you like officers better. There are heaps of them here. I don’t know where they come from, and they never seem to have anything to do. The young ladies, however—those who don’t run after Mr. O’Callaghan—seem to think them very nice.’

‘ Oh, Miss Todd, I don’t want clergymen or officers.’

‘ Don’t you ? Well then, we’ll get some novels from the circulating library. At three o’clock I always drive out, and we’ll go to the pastrycook’s. Oh, I declare, here’s Sir Lionel Bertram, as usual. You know Sir Lionel, don’t you ?’

Adela said that she had met Sir Lionel at Miss Baker’s.

‘ What a pity that match should have gone off, isn’t it ? I mean dear Miss Waddington. But though that match is off, another may come on. I for one should be very happy. You don’t know anything about it, I see. I’ll tell you some of these days. How do, Sir Lionel ? You mustn’t stay long, because Miss Gauntlet

and I am going out. Or I'll tell you what. You shall take care of us. It's a beautiful day; and if Miss Gauntlet likes, we'll walk instead of having the fly.' Miss Todd never aped grandeur, and always called her private carriage a fly, because it had only one horse.

Sir Lionel, having made his salutations to Miss Gauntlet, declared that he should be most happy to be trusted with their custody through the streets of Littlebath.

'But we can't walk either, Miss Gauntlet, to-day, because I must call on old Mrs. Leake, at Rissbury. I quite forgot Mrs. Leake. So you see, Sir Lionel, we shan't want you after all.'

Sir Lionel declared that this last decision made him quite miserable.

'You'll be recovered by dinner-time, I don't doubt,' said Miss Todd. 'And now I'll go upstairs and put my bonnet on. As Miss Gauntlet has got hers, you can stay and talk to her.'

'Charming creature, Miss Todd; isn't she?' said Sir Lionel, before the door was well closed. 'Such freshness of character, so much bonhomie—a little odd sometimes.' These last words were not added till Miss Todd's footsteps, heavier than Camilla's, were heard well up the stairs.

‘She seems to be a very good-natured person. I never saw her before to-day.’

‘Did you not? We knew her very intimately in the Holy Land’—as if any land ever was or could be holy to Sir Lionel and such as he. ‘That is, George and I, and Caroline. Of course, you know all about that Miss Waddington.’

Adela signified to him that she did know the circumstances to which he alluded.

‘It is very sad, is it not? and then the connection between them being so near; and their being the joint-heirs to such an enormous property! I know the people here take Caroline’s part, and say that she has been hardly used. But I cannot say that I blame George; I cannot, indeed.’

‘It is one of those cases in which no one should be blamed.’

‘Exactly—that is just what I say. My advice to George was this. Don’t let money influence your conduct in any way. Thank God, there’s enough of that for all of us! What you have to think of, is her happiness and your own. That’s what I said; and I do believe he took my advice. I don’t think he had any sordid views with reference to Caroline’s fortune.’

‘I am sure he had not.’

‘Oh, no, never. What Sir Henry’s views may

be, I don't pretend to know. People here do say that he has been ingratiating himself with my brother for some time past. He has my leave, Miss Gauntlet. I am an old man, old enough to be your father'—the well-preserved old beau might have said grandfather—'and my experience of life is this, that money is never worth the trouble that men take to get it. They say my brother is fond of it; if so, I think he has made a mistake in life—a great mistake.'

All this sounded very nice, but even to Adela's inexperienced ears it was not like the ring of genuine silver. After all, mock virtue imposes on but few people. The man of the world is personally known for such; as also are known the cruel, the griping, the avaricious, the unjust. That which enables the avaricious and the unjust to pass scatheless through the world is not the ignorance of the world as to their sins, but the indifference of the world whether they be sinful or no.

'And now, Sir Lionel, you may just put us into the fly, and then we won't keep you any longer,' said Miss Todd, as she re-entered the room with her bonnet and shawl.

Mrs. Leake, who lived at Rissbury, was a deaf old lady, not very popular among other old ladies at Littlebath. All the world, of course,

knows that the village of Rissbury is hardly more than a suburb of Littlebath, being distant from the High Street not above a mile and a half. It will be remembered that the second milestone on Hinchcombe Road is altogether beyond the village, just as you begin to ascend the hill near the turnpike.

Mrs. Leake was not very popular, seeing that though her ear was excessively dull, her tongue was peculiarly acute. She had the repute of saying the most biting things of any lady in Littlebath—and many of the ladies of Littlebath were apt to say biting things. Then Mrs. Leake did not play cards, nor did she give suppers, nor add much in any way to the happiness of the other ladies, her compatriots. But she lived in rather a grand house of her own, whereas others lived in lodgings; she kept a carriage with a pair of horses, whereas others kept flies; and she had some mysterious acquaintance with the countyocracy which went a long way with the ladies of Littlebath; though what good it even did to Mrs. Leake herself was never very apparent.

It is a terrible bore to have to talk to people who use speaking-trumpets, and who are so fidgety themselves that they won't use their speaking-trumpets properly. Miss Todd greatly

dreaded the speaking-trumpet; she did not usually care one straw for Mrs. Leake's tongue, nor much for her carriage and horses, or county standing; but the Littlebath world called on Mrs. Leake; and Miss Todd being at Rome did as Romans do.

'I'll take her for five minutes,' said Miss Todd, as, driving through the village of Rissbury, she finished her description of the lady; 'and then do you take her up for five more; and then I'll go on again; and then we'll go away.' Adela agreed, though with a heavy heart; for what subject of conversation could she find on which to dilate to Mrs. Leake through a speaking-trumpet for five minutes?

'Miss who?' said Mrs. Leake, putting her trumpet down from her ear that she might stare the better at Adela. 'Oh, Miss Gaunt—very well—I hope you'll like Littlebath, Miss Gaunt.'

'Miss Gaunt-let!' shouted Miss Todd, with a voice that would have broken the trumpet into shivers had it not been made of the very best metal.

'Never hollo, my dear. When you do that I can't hear at all. It only makes a noise like a dog barking. You'll find the young men about Littlebath very good-natured, Miss Gaunt. They are rather empty-headed—but I think young ladies generally like them all the better for that.'

Adela felt herself called on to make no answer to this, as it was not her turn at the trumpet.

‘What news have you heard lately, Mrs. Leake?’ asked Miss Todd. The great thing was to make Mrs. Leake talk instead of having to talk to her.

‘Amuse! No, I don’t think they do amuse any one very much. But then that’s not their line. I suppose they can dance, most of them; and those who’ve got any money may do for husbands—as the world goes. We musn’t be too particular; must we, Miss Gaunt?’

‘Miss Gaunt—let,’ whispered Miss Todd into the trumpet, separating the sounds well, so that they should not clash on the unsusceptible tympanum of her friend’s ear.

‘Let, let, let! I think I can hear anybody almost better than I can you, Miss Todd. I don’t know how it is, but I never can hear the people out of the town as well as I can my own set. It’s habit I take it.’

‘They’re used to deaf people in the country, I suppose,’ said Miss Todd, who, with all her good nature, didn’t choose to be over much put upon.

‘Ah, I can’t hear you,’ said Mrs. Leake. She had, however, heard this. ‘But I want you to tell me something about this Caroline Waddington. Isn’t it true she’s got another lover already?’

‘ Oh, quite true ; she’s going to be married.’

‘ Wants to be married. Yes, I don’t doubt she wants to be married. That’s what they all want, only some are not able to manage it. Ha ! ha ! ha ! I beg your pardon, Miss Gaunt ; but we old women must have our joke about the young ones ; mustn’t we, Miss Todd ?’ Mrs. Leake, be it noticed, was past seventy, whereas, our dear Miss Todd, was only just forty-four.

‘ Miss Gauntlet can tell you all about Miss Waddington,’ said Miss Todd, in her very plainest voice. ‘ They are very great friends, and correspond with each other.’ So Miss Todd handed over the spout of the trumpet.

‘ She was corresponding with another ! I dare say she was ; with half a dozen at once. Do you know anything about it, Miss Gaunt ?’

Poor Adela ! what was she to say or do. Her hand absolutely trembled as she put it lightly to the instrument. Thrice she bent her head down before she was able to say anything, and thrice she lifted it up in despair.

‘ Is it the lady or the gentleman that is a friend of yours, my dear ? or which of the gentlemen ? I hope she has not robbed you of a beau.’

‘ Miss Waddington is a very dear friend of mine, ma’am.’

‘ Oh ; she is, is she ?’

‘And I know Mr. Bertram also.’

‘Is he a dear friend too? Well, I suppose he’s disengaged now. But they tell me he’s got nothing, eh?’

‘I really don’t know.’

‘It’s very hard to know; very. I don’t much admire such jilts myself, but—’

‘Miss Waddington did not jilt him, madam.’

‘Then he jilted her. That’s just what I want to come at. I’m very much obliged to you, my dear. I see you can tell me all about it. It was about money, wasn’t it?’

‘No,’ shouted Adela, with an energy that quite surprised herself. ‘Money had nothing to do with it.’

‘I did not say you had anything to do with it. But don’t take up that habit of holloing from Miss Todd. I suppose the truth was that he found out what he wasn’t meant to find out. Men shouldn’t be too inquisitive; should they, Miss Todd? You are quite right, Miss Gaunt, don’t have anything to do with it; it’s a bad affair.’

‘I think you are very much mistaken, madam,’ said Adela, again shouting. But it was all thrown away. ‘I can’t hear a word, when you hollo in that way, not a word,’ said Mrs. Leake. And then Adela, with an imploring look at Miss Todd, relinquished her seat.

Miss Todd rose with the usual little speech about leave-taking. She had, as we have seen, intended to have gone in for a second innings herself, but all hope of winning the game against Mrs. Leake was over; even her courage was nearly upset; so making a little whisper to Adela, she held out her hand to the old lady, and prepared to depart.

‘Dear me, you are in a great hurry to go,’ said Mrs. Leake.

‘Yes; we are rather in a hurry this morning,’ said Miss Todd, neglectful of the trumpet, ‘we have so many people to see.’

‘Well, good-bye; I’m very much obliged to you for coming, and Miss Todd’—and here Mrs. Leake affected to whisper; but her whisper would have been audible to a dozen, had a dozen been there—‘I mustn’t forget to wish you joy about Sir Lionel. Good morning to you, Miss Gaunt,’ and then Mrs. Leake dropt an old-fashioned gracious curtsy.

To say that Miss Todd blushed would be to belie the general rosiness of that lady’s complexion. She was all blush always. Over her face colour of the highest was always flying. It was not only that her cheeks carried a settled brilliant tint, but at every smile—and Miss Todd was ever smiling—this tint would suffuse her fore-

head and her neck; at every peal of laughter—and her peals of laughter were innumerable—it would become brighter and brighter, coming and going, or rather ever coming fresh and never going, till the reflection from her countenance would illumine the whole room, and light up the faces of all around her. But now she almost blushed black. She had delighted hitherto in all the little bits of libellous tittle tattle to which her position as a young old maid had given rise, and had affected always to assist their propagation; but there was a poison about this old female snake, a sting in the tongue of this old adder which reached even her.

‘The old fool!’ said Miss Todd, by no means *sotto voce*.

Mrs. Leake heard her though the speaking trumpet was not in action. ‘No, no, no,’ she said, in her most good-natured voice, ‘I don’t think he’s such a fool at all. Of course he is old, and in want of an income, no doubt. But then he’s a knight you know, my dear, and a colonel;’ and then the two ladies, waiting for no further courtesies, went back to their fly.

Miss Todd had quite regained her good-humour by the time she was seated. ‘Well,’ said she, what do you think of my friend, Mrs. Leake?’

‘What makes her so very spiteful?’ asked Adela.

‘Why, you see, my dear, she’d be nothing if she wasn’t spiteful. It’s her fate. She’s very old, and she lives there by herself, and she doesn’t go out much, and she has nothing to amuse her. If she didn’t do that, she couldn’t do anything. I rather like it myself.’

‘Well, I can’t say I like it,’ said Adela; and then they sat silent for a time, Miss Todd the while reflecting whether she would, in any way, defend herself from that imputation about Sir Lionel.

‘But you see what sort of a woman she is, Miss Gauntlet; and, of course, you must not believe a word that she says.’

‘How very dreadful!’

‘Oh; it does not mean anything. I call all those white lies. Nobody notices them. But what she said about Sir Lionel, you know—’

‘I really shall not think of anything she said.’

‘But I must explain to you,’ said Miss Todd, in whose mind, in spite of her blushing, a certain amount of pleasure was mixed with the displeasure which Mrs. Leake’s scandal had caused her. For at this moment Sir Lionel was not a little thought of at Littlebath, and among the Lucretias

there assembled, there was many a one who would have felt but small regret in abandoning her maiden meditations at the instance of Sir Lionel Bertram.

‘But I must explain to you. Sir Lionel does come to see me very often; and I should think there was something in it—or, rather, I shouldn’t be surprised at others thinking so—only that I am quite sure that he’s thinking of somebody else.’

‘Is he?’ asked Adela, perhaps not with a great deal of animation.

‘Yes; and I’ll tell you who that somebody else is. Mind, I shouldn’t say anything about it if I wasn’t sure; that is almost sure; for one never can be quite sure about anything.’

‘Then I don’t think one ought to talk about people.’

‘Oh, that’s all very well. But then, at such a place as Littlebath, one would have to hold one’s tongue altogether. I let people talk of me, and so I talk about them. One can’t live without it, my dear. But I don’t say things like Mrs. Leake.’

‘I’m sure you don’t.’

‘But now about Sir Lionel; can’t you guess who it is?’

‘How should I, Miss Todd? I don’t know

a person in Littlebath except you and Miss Baker.

‘There; now you have guessed it; I knew you would. Don’t say I told you.’

‘Miss Baker marry Sir Lionel!’

‘Yes, Miss Baker marry Sir Lionel! and why not? Why shouldn’t she? and why shouldn’t he? I think it would be very wise. I think those sort of marriages often make people very happy.’

‘Do you think he loves her?’ said Adela, whose ideas of marriage were of very primitive description.

‘Well, I don’t see why he shouldn’t; that is in a sort of a way. He won’t write poetry about her eyebrows, if you mean that. But I think he’d like her to keep his house for him; and now that Caroline is going away, I think she’d like to have some one to live with. She’s not born to be a solitary wild beast as I am.’

Adela was surprised, but she had nothing to say. She was aware of no reason which it suited her to allege why Miss Baker should not marry Sir Lionel Bertram. Had she been asked before, she would have said that Miss Baker seemed settled in her maiden life; and that she was but little likely to be moved by the civil speeches of an old military beau. But silence

was perhaps the more prudent, and, therefore, she said nothing.

Her fortnight with Miss Todd passed without much inconvenience to her. She had to sit out one or two card-parties; and to resist, at last with peremptory decision, her host's attempts to take her elsewhere. But Miss Todd was so truly kind, so generous, so fond of making others happy, that she won upon Adela at last, and they parted excellent friends.

'I am so fond of Miss Baker,' Miss Todd said, on the last morning; 'and I do so truly hope she'll be happy; but don't you say a word about what I was saying. Only you watch if it isn't true. You'll see quite as much of Sir Lionel there as you have here:' and so they parted, and Adela was transferred over to Montpellier Terrace.

There had been some probability that Caroline would return to Littlebath with her aunt; but such was not the case. The autumn was advancing to its close. It was now November, and hardly a month remained before that—may we say happy day?—on which Miss Waddington was to become Lady Harcourt. There was, as Miss Baker said, so much to do, and so little time to do it! It had therefore been decided that Caroline should not return to Littlebath.

‘And you have come back only on my account?’ said Adela.

‘Not at all; I should have come back any way, for many reasons. I like to see Mr. Bertram from time to time, especially now that he has acknowledged Caroline; but it would kill me to stay long at that house. Did you see much of Sir Lionel while you were at Miss Todd’s?’

‘Yes, a good deal,’ said Adela, who could hardly keep from smiling as she answered the question.

‘He is always there, I believe. My idea is, that they mean to make a match of it. It is, indeed.’

‘Oh, no; I don’t think that.’

‘Don’t you now? Well, you have been in the house, and must have seen a great deal. But what else can bring him there so much?’

‘Miss Todd says he’s always talking about you.’

‘About me; what nonsense!’ And Miss Baker went up to her room rather better pleased than she had been.

Caroline, as will be remembered, had written to Adela with the tidings of her new engagement. Adela had answered that letter affectionately, but shortly; wishing her friend every happiness, and saying what little in the cheerful vein she could allow herself to say on such an

occasion. The very shortness of her letter had conveyed condemnation, but that Adela could not help.

Caroline had expected condemnation. She knew that she would be condemned, either by words or by the lack of them; it was nearly equal to her by which. Her mind was in that state, that having half condemned herself, she would have given anything for a cordial acquittal from one she loved and valued. But she did not expect it from Adela, and she did not receive it.

She carried herself with a brave face, however. To her grandfather, to Miss Baker, and to her betrothed, she showed no sign of sorrow, no sign of repentance; but though there was, perhaps, no repentance in her heart, there was much sorrow and much remorse, and she could not keep herself wholly silent.

She wrote again to Adela, almost imploring her for pity. We need not give the whole letter, but a portion of it will show how the poor girl's mind was at work. 'I know you have judged me, and found me guilty,' she said. 'I can tell that from the tone of your letter, though you were generous enough to endeavour to deceive me. But you have condemned me because you do not know me. I feel sure that what I am doing, is prudent, and, I think I may say, right.

Had I refused Sir Henry's offer, or some other such offer—and any offer to me would have been, and must have been open to the same objections—what should I have done? what would have been my career? I am not now speaking of happiness. But of what use could I have been to any one?

' You will say that I do not love Sir Henry. I have told him that in the usual acceptation of the word, I do not love him. But I esteem his high qualities; and I shall marry him with the full intention of doing my duty, of sacrificing myself to him if needs be, of being useful in the position in which he will place me. What better can I do than this? You can do better, Adela. I know you will do better. To have loved, and married for love the poorest gentleman on God's earth would be to have done better. But I cannot do that now. The power of doing that has been taken from me. The question with me was, whether I should be useful as a wife, or useless as an unmarried woman? For useless I should have been, and petulant, and wretched. Employment, work, duty, will now save me from that. Dear Adela, try to look at it in this way if it be possible. Do not throw me over without an attempt. Do not be unmerciful. * * * At any rate,' she ended her letter by saying—

‘ At any rate you will come to me in London in the early, early spring. Say that you will do so, or I shall think that you mean to abandon me altogether!’

Adela answered this as sweetly and as delicately as she could. Natures, she said, were different, and it would be presumptuous in her to set herself up as judge on her friend’s conduct. She would abstain from doing so, and would pray to God that Caroline and Sir Henry might be happy together. And as to going to London in the spring, she would do so if her aunt Penelope’s plans would allow of it. She must of course be governed by her aunt Penelope, who was now hurrying home from Italy on purpose to give her a home.

Nothing further occurred this year at Littlebath sufficiently memorable to need relation, unless it be necessary further to relate Miss Baker’s nervous apprehensions respecting Sir Lionel. She was, in truth, so innocent that she would have revealed every day to her young friend the inmost secrets of her heart if she had had secrets. But, in truth, she had none. She was desperately jealous of Miss Todd, but she herself knew not why. She asked all manner of questions as to his going and coming, but she never asked herself why she was so anxious

about it. She was in a twitter of sentimental restlessness, but she did not understand the cause of her own uneasiness. On the days that Sir Lionel came to her, she was happy, and in good spirits; when, however, he went to Miss Todd, she was fretful. Sometimes she would rally him on his admiration for her rival, but she did it with a bad grace. Wit, repartee, and sarcasm were by no means her forte. She could not have stood up for five minutes against deaf old Mrs. Leake; and when she tried her hand on Sir Lionel, her failure was piteous. It merely amounted to a gentle rebuke to him for going to the Paragon instead of coming to Montpellier Terrace. Adela saw it all, and saw also that Sir Lionel was in no way sincere. But what could she do, or what could she say?

‘I hope Miss Todd was quite well yesterday, Sir Lionel?’ Miss Baker would say.

‘I don’t think there was much the matter with her,’ Sir Lionel would answer. ‘She was talking a great deal about you while I was with her.’

‘About me; he! he! he! I’m sure you had something better than me to talk of.’

‘There could be nothing better,’ the gallant colonel would say.

‘Oh, couldn’t there? and when is it to be? Adela here is most anxious to know.’

‘How can you say so, Miss Baker? You know I am not anxious at all.’

‘Well, if you’re not, I am. I hope we shall be asked—ha! ha! ha!’

And why did not Sir Lionel make up his mind and put an end, in one way or the other, to the torment of this poor lady? Many reasons guided him in his high policy. In the first place, he could not make himself certain whether Miss Todd would accept him or refuse him. Her money was by far the safer; her fortune was assured; what she possessed, Sir Lionel already knew to a fraction.

But Miss Baker, he was sure, would accept him; and having accepted him, would be amenable to all his little reasons in life, obedient, conformable, and, in money matters, manageable. Miss Todd, on the other hand, might, nay, certainly would have a will of her own. He would sooner have taken Miss Baker with half the money.

But then would Miss Baker have half the money? If that stupid old man at Hadley would only go, and tell the only tale with which it was now possible that he should interest the world, then Sir Lionel would know how to act. At any rate, he would wait till after the solicitor-general’s marriage. It might appear on that

occasion whether or no Sir Henry was to be regarded as the old man's heir in all things. If so, Sir Lionel would be prepared to run all matrimonial risks, and present Miss Todd to the world as Lady Bertram.

CHAPTER XV.

MARRIAGE-BELLS.

AND now came the day of execution. 'A long day, my lord, a long day,' screams the unfortunate culprit from the dock when about to undergo the heaviest sentence of the law. But the convicted wretch is a coward by his profession. Caroline Waddington was no coward. Having made up her mind to a long martyrdom, she would not condescend to ask for one short month of grace.

'I don't like to press you unfairly,' Sir Henry had said, 'but you know how I am situated with regard to business.'

'It shall be as you wish,' Caroline had said. And so the day had been settled; a day hardly more than six months distant from that on which she had half permitted the last embrace from her now forfeited, but not forgotten lover.

Duty was now her watchword to herself. For the last six weeks she had been employed—nay, more than employed—hard at work—doing the best she could for her future husband's happiness

and welfare. She had given orders with as much composure as a woman might do who had been the mistress of her lord's purse and bosom for the last six years. Tradesmen, conscious of the coming event, had had their little delicacies and made their little hints. But she had thrown all these to the wind. She had spoken of Sir Henry as Sir Henry, and of herself as being now Miss Waddington, but soon about to be Lady Harcourt, with a studied openness. She had looked to carriages and broughams—and horses also under Sir Henry's protection—as though these things were dear to her soul. But they were not dear, though in her heart she tried to teach herself that they were so. For many a long year—many at least in her still scanty list of years—she had been telling herself that these things were dear; that these were the prizes for which men strive and women too; that the wise and prudent gained them; and that she too would be wise and prudent, that she too would gain them. She had gained them; and before she had essayed to enjoy them, they turned into dust before her eyes, into ashes between her teeth.

Gilding and tinsel were no longer bright to her, silks and velvet were no longer soft. The splendour of her drawing-room, the richness of her draperies, the luxurious comfort of the chamber that was prepared for her, gave her no

delight. She acquiesced in these things because her lord desired that they should be there, and she intended that her lord should be among the rich ones of the earth. But not for one moment did she feel even that trumpety joy which comes from an elated spirit.

Her lord! there was the misery; there was the great rock against which she feared that the timbers of her bark would go in pieces. If she could only have the three first years done and over. If she could only jump at once to that time in which habit would have made her fate endurable! Her lord! Who was her lord truly? Had she not in her heart another lord, whom her whole soul would worship, despite her body's efforts?

And then she began to fear for her beauty; not for her own sake; not with that sort of sorrow which must attend the waning roses of those ladies who, in early years, have trusted too much to their loveliness. No; it was for the sake of him to whom she had sold her beauty. She would fain perform her part of that bargain. She would fain give him on his marriage-day all that had been intended in his purchase. If, having accepted him, she allowed herself to pine and fade away because she was to be his, would she not in fact be robbing him? Would not that be unjust? All that she could give him he should have.

But neither did Sir Henry see any change, nor did Mr. Bertram, nor those others who were round her. Indeed, hers was not a beauty that would fade in such manner. When she saw her own eyes heavy with suppressed wretchedness, she feared for herself. But her power over herself was great, and that look was gone as soon as others were with her.

But her worst sufferings were at night. She would wake from her short slumbers, and see him, him always before her; that him who in the essence of things was still her lord, the master of her woman's mind, the lord of her woman's soul. To screen her eyes from that sight, she would turn her moistened face to the pillow; but her eyeballs would flash in the darkness, and she would still see him there, there before her. She would see him as he stood beside her with manly bashfulness, when on the side of Olivet he first told her that he loved her. She would see him as he had sometimes sat, in his sweetest moods, in that drawing-room at Littlebath, talking to her with rapid utterance, with sweet, but energetic utterance, saying words which she did not always fully understand, but which she felt to be full of wit, full of learning, full of truth. Ah, how proud she had been of him then—so proud of him, though she would never say so! And then she would see him, as he came to her on that fatal

day, boiling in his wrath, speaking such words as had never before reached her ears ; words, however, of which so many had been tinged by an inexpressible tenderness.

Then she would turn herself in her bed, and, by a strong effort of her will, she would for a while throw off such thoughts. She would count over to herself the chairs and tables she had ordered, the cups and china bowls which were to decorate her room, till sleep would come again—but in sleep she would still dream of him. Ah, that there might have been no waking from such dreams !

But in the morning she would come down to breakfast with no trouble on her outward brow. She was minutely particular in her dress, even when no one but her grandfather was to see the effects of her toilet. Her hair was scrupulously neat, her dresses were rich and in the newest fashion. Her future career was to be that of Lady Harcourt, a leader of ton ; and she was determined to commence her new duties with a good grace.

And so from week to week, and day to day, she prepared herself for the sacrifice.

Miss Baker of course returned to Hadley a day or two before the ceremony. The recent death of old Mr. Gauntlet was Adela's excuse for not being present. Had there been no such excuse, she

would have been forced to act a bridesmaid's part. It was much better for both of them that she had not to perform the task.

Bridesmaids were chosen in London—eight of them. These were not special friends of Caroline's; indeed, it had not been her instinct to attach to herself special friends. Circumstances had created friendship between her and Adela, unlike in all things as they were to each other. But other bosom-friends Caroline had not; nor had she felt the want of them.

This was perhaps well for her now. It would have driven her to madness if among the bevy of attendant nymphs there had been any to whom it would have been necessary for her to open her heart—to open it, or to pretend to open it. Much she could do; much she was now doing; much she was prepared to do. But she could not have spoken with missish rapture of her coming happiness; nor could she, to any ears, have laid bare the secrets of her bosom.

So eight young ladies were had from London. Two were second-cousins by her father's side; one, who was very full of the universal joy that was to follow this happy event, was a sister of Sir Henry's; a fourth was the daughter of an old crony of Miss Baker's; and the other four were got to order—there being no doubt a repertory for articles so useful and so ornamental.

Old Mr. Bertram behaved well on the occasion. He told Miss Baker that nothing was to be spared—in moderation ; and he left her to be sole judge of what moderation meant. She, poor woman, knew well enough that she would have at some future day to fight over with him the battle of the bills. But for the moment he affected generosity, and so a fitting breakfast was prepared.

And then the bells were rung, the Hadley bells, the merry marriage-bells.

I know full well the tone with which they toll when the soul is ushered to its last long rest. I have stood in that green churchyard when earth has been laid to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust—the ashes and the dust that were loved so well.

But now the scene was of another sort. How merrily they rang, those joyous marriage-bells ! Youth was now to know the full delight of matured happiness. Soul should be joined to soul, heart to heart, hand to hand, manly strength and vigour to all the grace and beauty of womanhood. The world was pleasant with its most joyous smile as it opened its embraces to the young pair—about to be two no longer—now to become one bone and one flesh. Out rung the Hadley bells, the happy marriage-bells.

And when should bells ring so joyously ? Do

they not give promise of all that this world knows of happiness? What is love, sweet pure love, but the anticipation of this, the natural longing for this, the consummation of our loving here? To neither man nor woman does the world fairly begin till seated together in their first mutual home they bethink themselves that the excitement of their honeymoon is over. It would seem that the full meaning of the word marriage can never be known by those who, at their first outspring into life, are surrounded by all that money can give. It requires the single sitting-room, the single fire, the necessary little efforts of self-devotion, the inward declaration that some struggle shall be made for that other one, some world's struggle of which wealth can know nothing. One would almost wish to be poor, that one might work for one's wife; almost wish to be ill used, that one might fight for her.

He, as he goes forth to his labour, swears within his heart that, by God's help on his endeavours, all shall go well with her. And she, as she stands musing alone in her young home, with a soft happy tear in her bright eye, she also swears in her heart that, by God's help, his home shall be to him the sweetest spot on the earth's surface. Then should not marriage-bells ring joyously? Ah, my friends, do not count too exactly your

three hundreds a year—your four hundreds. Try the world. But try it with industry and truth, not with idleness and falsehood.

And now Sir Henry and Lady Harcourt were to try the world in sweet communion together. One may say that, as to doubt about the trial, there was need of none. He had more than won his spurs. He was already a practised knight in the highest flight of the world's tourneys. And for her, too, there was little cause of fear. They who saw her arrayed in that bright frosty marriage morning, and watched the majesty of her brow, the brilliancy of her eye, the grace and dignity of her step, all swore that the young lawyer had done well. He had found for himself a meet companion for his high career; a proper bride for his coming greatness. And so the marriage-bells rang on, with all their merriness, with all their joy.

And now the words have been said, the vows have been plighted, the magic circlet of pure gold has done its wondrous work. The priest smiles and grasps their hands as he gives them his parting friendly blessing. Laughing bridesmaids press in to sign the book, and all observe that no signature was ever written with more decision than that of Caroline Waddington.

Caroline Waddington now no longer! Yes; the deed had, in truth, been done. The vows had

been plighted. She had taken this man to be her wedded husband, to live together with him after God's ordinance. She had sworn to obey him, and serve him, and— Ah! ah! ah! How had she lived while that word was uttered to her! how had she lived to swear that falsest oath!

But it was not then, while standing at the altar, that the struggle had been made. Then she did but act her part, as some stage-queen acts hers: She acted it well; that was all. There was no meaning in her words then. Though her lips moved, she swore no oath. Her oath had been sworn before that.

No educated woman, we may suppose, stands at the altar as a bride, without having read and re-read those words till they are closely fixed on her memory. It is a great oath, and a woman should know well what that is to which she is about to pledge herself. Caroline Waddington had studied them well. She would live with him after God's ordinance; that is, as his wife. Yes, she was prepared for that. She would obey him. Yes; if obedience were required, she would give it. Serve him? oh, yes, certainly; to the best of her power of mind and body. Love him? No; she was bold, at least, if not righteous. No; she could not love him. But, then, how few who were married complied with all those behests? How many were undutiful, disobedient,

careless? Might not she except for herself one point? be false on one article if she were true in so many? She would honour him, for honour was possible to her; she would keep him in sickness and health, and forsaking all other—yes, all other, in body certainly, in heart too if God would give her ease—and keep herself only to him, her husband. And so she swore to it all before she went there—all, with the one exception.

And Sir Henry swore too—with a light, indifferent oath, which, however, he had no intention of breaking in any part. He would live with her, and love her, and comfort her, and all that sort of thing;—and very well she would look at the top of his table, in black velvet.

And the merry bells went on ringing as they trooped back to the old man's house. They went in gay carriages, though the distance was but some hundred yards. But brides and bridegrooms cannot walk on their wedding-days in all their gala garments, though it be but a few hundred yards.

And then, as they entered the breakfast-room, the old man met them, and blessed them. He was too infirm to go to church, and had seen none of them before the ceremony; but now that the deed was done, he also was there, dressed in his best, his last new coat, not more than twelve years old, his dress waistcoat sent home before the Reform Bill, his newest shoes, which creaked

twice worse than any of their older brethren. But when a man can shower thousands on a wedded pair, what do they, or even the bridesmaids, care about his clothes?

And then after this fashion he blessed them—not holding each a hand as he might otherwise have done; for his infirmities compelled him to use two crutches.

‘I wish you joy, Sir Henry—of your bride—with all my heart. And a bonny bride she is, and well able to take her place in the world. Though you’ll be rich and well to do, you’ll not find her over-extravagant. And though her fortune’s not much for a man like you, perhaps, she might have had less, mightn’t she? ha! ha! ha! Little as it is, it will help—it will help. And you’ll not find debts coming home after her; I’m sure of that. She’ll keep your house well together; and your money too—but I guess you’ll not leave that to her keeping.

‘And I wish you joy with all my heart, my Lady Harcourt. You’ve done very well—much better doubtless than we were thinking of; you and me too. And as for me, I was an old fool.’ Mr. Bertram was doubtless thinking of that interview with his nephew. ‘Much better, much better. Your husband’s a rising man, and he’ll live to be a rich man. I have always thought a lawyer’s profession very good for a man who

would know how to make money at it. Sir Henry knows how to do that well. So I wish you joy with all my heart, Lady Bertram—Harcourt, I mean. And now we'll sit down and have a bit of something to eat.' Such was the marriage-blessing of this old man, who knew and understood the world so well. To be Lady Harcourt, and have the spending of three or four thousand a year! What a destiny was that for his granddaughter! And to have achieved that without any large call upon his own purse!

It was not intended that Sir Henry and his bride were to sit down to the breakfast. That is, I believe, now voted to be a bore—and always should have been so voted. They had done, or were now to do their necessary eating in private, and the company was to see no more of them. An effort had been made to explain this to Mr. Bertram, but it had not been successful. So when Caroline kissed him, and bade him adieu after his little speech, he expressed himself surprised.

'What, off before the breakfast! What's the good of the breakfast then?' His idea, in his extravagance, had been that he would give a last feed to the solicitor-general. But he had another piece of extravagance in his mind, which he had been unable to bring himself to perpetrate till the last moment; but which now he did perpetrate.

'Sir Henry, Sir Henry,' and he toddled to a

window. Here; you'll be spending a lot of money on her in foreign parts, and I think you have behaved well; here,' and he slipped a bit of paper into his hands. 'But, remember, it will be the last. And, Sir Henry, remember the interest of the three thousand—punctually—eh, Sir Henry?'

Sir Henry nodded—thanked him—slipped the bit of paper into his pocket, and followed his bride to the carriage.

'Your grandfather has just given me five hundred pounds,' was his first word in private to his wife.

'Has he?' said Lady Harcourt, 'I'm very glad of it; very.' And so she was. What else had she to be glad of now, except hundreds—and hundreds—and hundreds of pounds?

And so they were whisked away to London, to Dover, to Paris, to Nice.

'Sed post equitem sedet atra cura.'

The care was very black that sat behind that female knight. But we will not now follow either her thoughts or her carriage-wheels.

END OF VOL. II.







